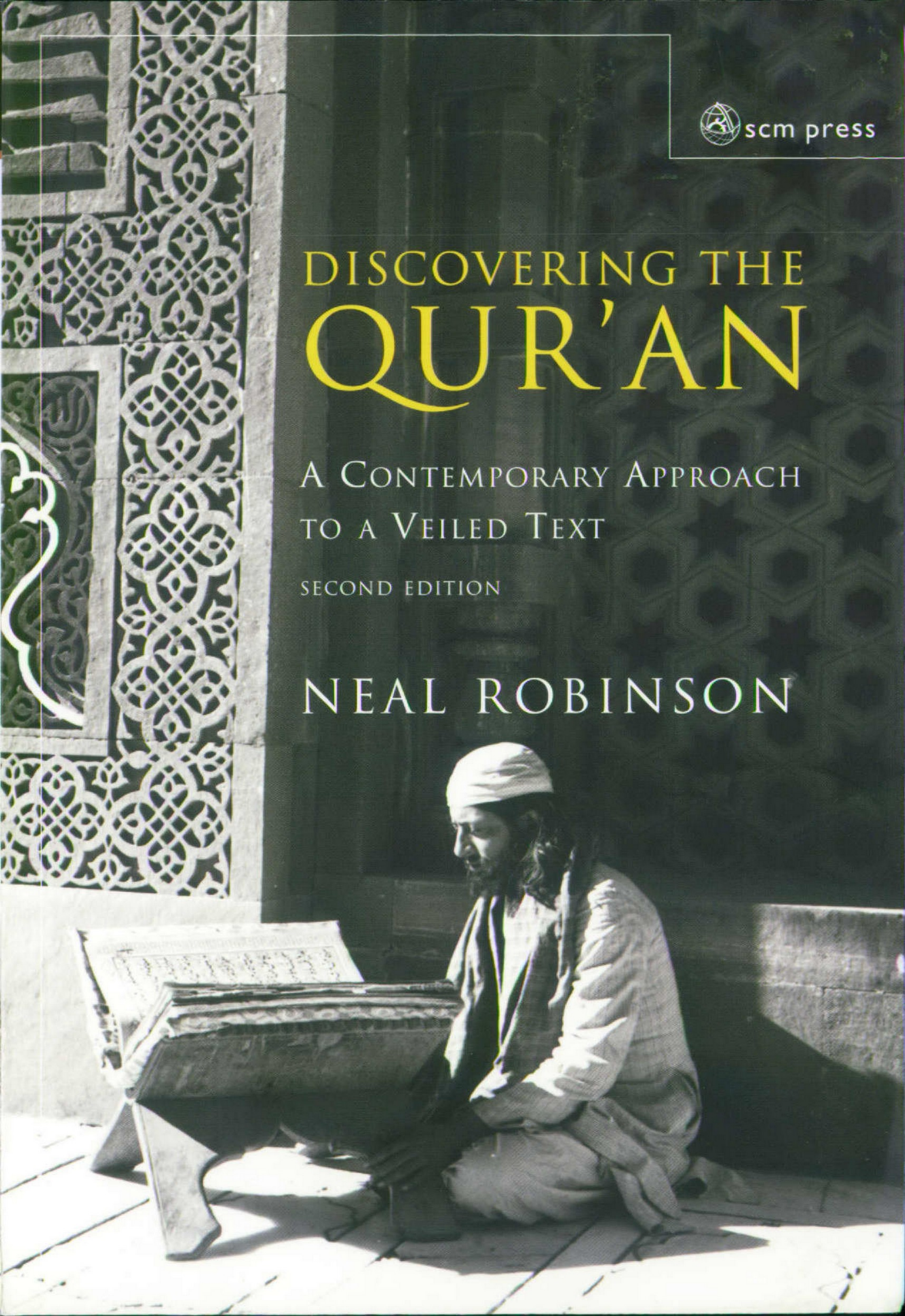

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DISCOVERING THE
QUR'AN
A CONTEMPORARY APPROACH
TO A VEILED TEXT
SECOND EDITION
NEAL ROBINSON

Discovering the Qur'an

Other books by Neal Robinson

Christ in Islam and Christianity: The Representation of Jesus in the Qur'ān and the Classical Muslim Commentaries, Macmillan & SUNY, 1991

The Sayings of Muhammad, Duckworth, 1991/Eco, 1998

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Discovering the Qur'an

A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text

Neal Robinson

Second Edition



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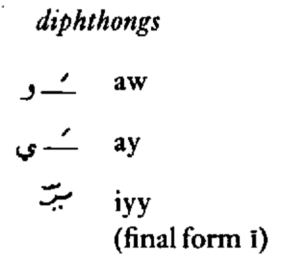
For Zoé

Contents

List of Transliterations

Arabic characters

ء	ʾ	س	s	ل	l
ب	b	ش	sh	م	m
ت	t	ص	ṣ	ن	n
ث	th	ض	ḍ	ه	h
ج	j	ط	ṭ	و	w
ح	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ي	y
خ	kh	ع	ʿ	ة	ah; at (construct state)
د	d	غ	gh		
ذ	dh	ف	f	ال	(article) al- and 'l- except before the anteropalatals)
ر	r	ق	q		
ز	z	ك	k		



long vowels		*short vowels*		*diphthongs*	
ا ى	ā	ـَ	a	ـَو	aw
و	ū	ـُ	u	ـَي	ay
ي	ī	ـِ	i	ـِيّ	iyy (final form ī)
				ـُوّ	uww (final form ū)

List of Maps and Illustrations

Preface to the Second Edition

The decision to reissue *Discovering the Qur'an* has furnished me with a welcome opportunity to make a number of amendments to the text. I have, however, resisted the temptation to tinker with the text or add further material.

I am grateful to readers of the First Edition who contacted me to express their appreciation and to sound out their own ideas. Several were puzzled by the reference on page 9 to the Prophet's 'young wife Ayesha'. They pointed out that when the Prophet began to receive revelations he was married to Khadījah, a widow who was many years his senior, and that he did not take further wives until after her death. This is perfectly correct but I had not inadvertently typed the wrong name; Bukhārī traces the tradition that I cited to Ayesha. If it is authentic it is presumably based on what she heard from the Prophet twelve or more years after the event.

At least one reviewer took me to task for the seemingly cavalier fashion in which I dismissed several modern translations of the Qur'an because of their 'serious defects'. The brief remarks I made about those translations (page 291) were in fact based on extensive research that I subsequently published as a journal article: 'Sectarian and Ideological Bias in English Translations of the Qur'an by Muslims', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, VIII/3, 1997, 261–78.

My views on the matters discussed in this volume have not changed radically. Nevertheless, if I were writing it now, I would dwell at greater length on two issues. The first is the role of chiasmus as an organizational principle. Although I indicated that three Meccan surahs seem to have chiastic structures, I attached little significance to this and even relegated the chiastic analysis of Surah 85 to an endnote. Since then, I have discovered that chiasmus is a key feature of some Madīnan surahs as well. As a result, I now realize that it has important implications for quranic interpretation. For further details, see my recent articles: 'The Structure and Interpretation of *Sūrat al-mu'minūn*', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, II/1, 2000, 89–106; and 'Hands Outstretched: Towards a Re-reading of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, III/1, 2001, 1–19. The second issue concerns surahs that appear relatively amorphous. It is of course

possible that they too will turn out to have complex and orderly structures that were hitherto overlooked, but I doubt whether this is true of all of them. It is also possible that some of them are ragbags of disparate material as many western scholars maintain, and that the quest for coherence is therefore a fruitless exercise. There is, however, a third possibility: the surahs may indeed be amorphous but nonetheless coherent in so far as they represent a multidimensional response to a specific set of circumstances that we can partially reconstruct by reading between the lines. I suggested this in the course of my discussion of Surah 17 on pages 188–95. I am currently attempting to develop the approach more fully with specific reference to Surah 3.

Neal Robinson
2003

Preface

It gives me pleasure to record my gratitude to those who have helped and encouraged me with this work. When Adrian Hastings approached me with a request from SCM Press for a book on how to read the Qur'an, I responded with a mixture of joy and trepidation. I had long wished to produce something of the sort but had been daunted by the difficulty of the task. Without that request, I might never have overcome my reticence. John Bowden has proved an extremely patient and understanding editor, allowing me the necessary time and giving me the freedom to write a book which turned out rather different from the one he initially had in mind. The Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds granted me leave of absence for a semester in 1994 to do the necessary groundwork. Aitisamul Haq Thanvi helped me organize a visit to Pakistan and introduced me to Abdul Rauf Tabani of the Tabani Corporation and Abu Saeed A. Iṣlāḥi, both of whom gave me generous hospitality and took great pains to ensure that everything ran smoothly. In the course of that visit, I met and talked with Mawlana Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥi about his commentary on the Qur'an. I also benefited from lengthy discussions with Khalid Masud and Asif Iftikhar about the Farahi-Iṣlāḥi school of Qur'anic interpretation. My elder daughter Zoé read most of the typescript and made valuable suggestions on how to make it more intelligible. Several generations of third-year undergraduates and MA students – Muslims, Christians and sceptics – have helped me to refine my ideas through participating in my courses on 'The Qur'an and its Interpreters' and 'Qur'anic Studies'. Needless to say, none of the above-mentioned persons is in any way responsible for the factual accuracy of the book or for the views expressed by the author. My eleven-year-old daughter Eléonor systematically searched my library to find calligraphic illustrations. Finally, my wife Danielle has continued to be a constant source of help and inspiration.

Unless otherwise indicated, the translation of Qur'anic āyahs is my own and the numbering is in accordance with that of the standard Egyptian edition.

Isolated Arabic words and names are usually transliterated in

accordance with the 'List of Transliterations'. I have, however, relaxed the rules with some words and names which have common currency in English: Qur'an, surah, Islam, Allah, Muhammad and Mecca (rather than Qur'ān, sūrah, Islām, Allāh, Muḥammad and Makkah). Likewise, in the case of prophets who are mentioned in both the Bible and the Qur'an, I have usually adopted the spelling found in the English Bible (e.g. Noah, Abraham, Lot, Joseph, Moses, David, Saul and Jesus) in preference to a transliteration of the Qur'anic Arabic (Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Lūṭ, Yūsuf, Mūsā, Ṭālūt, Dāwūd and 'Isā). In the case of whole āyahs or whole surahs, I have modified the transliteration in order to indicate to the non-Arabist how the letters are pronounced. For instance, in recitation an *n* which occurs immediately before a *b* is pronounced *m*, and is consequently transliterated as such. Finally, I have sometimes used capital letters to emphasize the fact that two words are derived from the same verbal root. For instance *islām* and *salām* (peace) might be transliterated *iSLāM* and *SaLāM*.

Neal Robinson

Sha'bān 1416
January 1996

I

Introduction

A *Natural Curiosity* is the title of a novel by Margaret Drabble. One of the characters in the novel was eager to understand Islam. He had discussed it with various experts on the Middle East, as well as with a devout gentle-mannered Muslim woman who dissociated herself from the extremists and fanatics. Then, still baffled, he had gone to the nearest bookshop and purchased a Penguin Classic, *The Koran*, translated with notes by N. J. Dawood. He was very put off to discover that the original editors of the sacred text had arranged the chapters not in chronological order but in order of decreasing length, and that the translator had rearranged them. He complained about this 'narrative anarchy' over the phone to his ex-wife.

> 'How can you understand the minds of people who don't respect *sequence*?' he wanted to know.
>
> 'I'm sure there must be *some* kind of sequence,' said Liz vaguely. 'Why don't you read on, and see if one emerges?'
>
> Charles read on but not very far. He managed to find one or two pleasant passages about rich brocades and sherbet and fountains and young boys as fair as virgin pearls, but he found a great deal more about unbelievers and wrongdoers and the Hour of Doom and the curse of Allah and thunderbolts and pitch and scolding water and the Pit of Hell. 'Will they not ponder on the Koran? Are there locks upon their hearts?' Charles decided that there was a lock upon his heart: was it because he had been seduced by Satan, as the Koran suggested? Surely not.[1]

Charles is, of course, a fictional character, but – if my own circle of friends and acquaintances is at all typical – there must be countless people in real life whose natural curiosity has led them to buy a translation of the Qur'an (I shall be using this more accurate transliteration) in the hope of gaining a better understanding of Islam, only to abandon it in desperation after reading at most a few dozen pages. It is for them that this book was originally conceived. For this reason I have endeavoured throughout to

bear in mind the needs of the intelligent non-specialist. Nevertheless, in so far as a substantial part of the book is based on original research, it will, I hope, also be of interest to scholars who are well-versed in Islamic studies.

This book comprises three unequal parts. Part One, headed 'Phenomenology', consists of a single chapter in which I attempt to give an account of how the Qur'an is experienced within the community of faith. As most Muslims who write about the Qur'an emphasize the content of its teaching and its status as divinely-given guidance for humankind, it may surprise them that I devote so much space to describing its acoustic qualities, the context in which it is heard, the part played by rote-learning and the importance of calligraphy. I am convinced, however, that this is necessary if the non-Muslim reader, with little or no first-hand experience of Islam, is to appreciate how much is lost when the Qur'an is encountered merely as a written text, out of context, and in translation.

Part Two is devoted to questions of chronology. In Chapter 2, I explore the relationship between the Qur'an and the earliest extant biographies of Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). After combing the Qur'an for evidence concerning the date and provenance of the revelations, I show how the biographical traditions may be used to construct a plausible chronological framework which makes sense of the Qur'anic data. Then in Chapter 3 I discuss the controversial alternative account of the rise of Islam proposed by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook. In Chapter 4 I examine the principal Islamic resources for determining the chronological order of the surahs (the 114 sections of the Qur'an which are sometimes misleadingly called chapters). These resources include the traditions about the 'occasions of the revelation', the literature concerning revelations which have been 'abrogated', and the traditional lists of Meccan and Madīnan surahs. I also discuss the status of the surah headings in the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur'an. In Chapter 5 I examine the attempts of European scholars to date the revelations on the basis of their style and content and try to assess whether or not Nöldeke's chronological reclassification of the surahs, modified in the light of Bell's researches, furnishes us with a better working hypothesis than the standard Egyptian chronology.

Part Three focusses on morphology, structure and coherence. In Chapter 6 I develop the pioneering work of Angelika Neuwirth so as to produce an inventory of all the formal elements found in the forty-eight

surahs which Nöldeke ascribed to the first Meccan period. Then, in Chapter 7, I discuss the overall structure of a selection of these surahs, as well as of the surahs which Nöldeke ascribed to the second and third Meccan periods. In addition, I make some tentative suggestions about the interdependence of the various 'registers' used in surahs of all three periods. In Chapter 8 I investigate the interrelationship of sound, meaning and structure in Surahs 103, 104 and 78. In Chapter 9 I do the same with Surahs 79 and 17, but also stress how these two surahs gain in coherence when read in the light of biblical and Qur'anic versions of the story of Moses. It is more difficult to give an account of the constituent elements and overall structure of the Madīnan surahs because of their length, but this is attempted in Chapter 10 with specific reference to Surah 2, which is the longest of all. In Chapter 11 I turn to discuss a feature of the Qur'an which non-Muslims generally find bewildering, namely the dynamics of the Qur'anic discourse. Is Allah always the implied speaker? If so, why does He use the first person plural 'We' and the first person singular 'I', often switching back and forth between the two? And why does He frequently refer to Himself as 'He', 'Allah', 'the All-merciful' and so on? Moreover, when the addressee is apparently an individual, as indicated by the use of the second person singular pronoun 'thou', is this individual invariably Muhammad? Finally, in Chapters 12 and 13, the debate centres on the rationale for the canonical order of the surahs: did the final editor of the Qur'an simply arrange them approximately in order of decreasing length, or was Margaret Drabble right in thinking that 'there must be *some* kind of sequence'?

I have tried to maintain the reader's interest by posing, maintaining and eventually resolving a number of enigmas. Nevertheless, she will find that this book requires much more effort than the standard fictional thriller. May I suggest several possible approaches? As my argument is cumulative, the book should ideally be read chapter by chapter, care being taken to look up every Qur'anic passage which is cited. I have, however, made provision for those with less time or stamina than this would require. Chapters 1 and 2 provide an essential orientation for anyone who is new to the field, but Chapters 3, 4 and 5 may be skipped at first reading. If you decide to skip one or more of these chapters, you may still follow the thread of my argument by reading the sections headed 'Introduction', 'Conclusion' or 'Concluding Discussion'. Chapter 6 is demanding. It will, however, repay careful study. You are advised to look up some of the Qur'anic passages mentioned in each section of the chapter, and not to proceed further until you have grasped the difference between the six

'registers' encountered in 'early Meccan' surahs. You will then be well-equipped to tackle Chapter 7, and to read whole surahs, beginning with those which are structurally relatively simple, and gradually building up to those which are extremely complex. If you do not have the time or inclination to read every surah that I have analysed, you should read one or two of each type. Chapters 8 and 9 may be omitted if you are in a hurry, but I hope that what is said in Chapter 1 about the acoustic qualities of the Qur'an, together with the brief remarks which accompany some of the analyses in Chapter 7, will whet your appetite for the in-depth study of five surahs which these chapters entail. If you can persuade someone to recite the surahs for you, all the better. Chapter 10 is long but not difficult. Ideally, you should read it in conjunction with Surah 2. Chapter 11, on the dynamics of the Qur'anic discourse, may be omitted at the first reading. I suspect, however, that by this stage you will see the need for it. In common with some other chapters, it contains long lists of references. I hope that you will not be deterred by them. Think of them as rather like the workings of a schoolboy doing his sums; if you want to know how I arrived at my answers, or you suspect that I have added two and two together and made six, they are there for you to check. If not, simply skim over them. Chapters 12 and 13 form a pair and should be read together. On completing them, you may feel encouraged to tackle all 114 surahs of the Qur'an in their canonical order.

It remains for me to recommend a translation of the Qur'an. Unfortunately none is entirely satisfactory. Those by Yusuf Ali and Marmaduke Pickthall are the most popular with Muslims. The former is the more accurate of the two, but both are generally reliable. Alas, however, neither is very consistent; they often translate an Arabic word or phrase in a variety of different ways, which makes it difficult for the reader to appreciate the structural unity of individual surahs and of the Qur'an as a whole. In this respect, Arberry's translation is far superior. It is, however, very difficult to use for reference purposes, because the numbers of the āyahs do not correspond to those in the standard Egyptian edition, which is now regarded as the norm. To locate a passage in Arberry, you will therefore need to consult the conversion table in Appendix A, which will also come in handy if you feel inspired by Chapter 5 to read the works of Richard Bell. The advantage of Yusuf Ali, Pickthall and Arberry over more modern translations is that they clearly distinguish between the second person singular 'thou' and the second person plural 'ye' or 'you'. Nevertheless, if you prefer modern English, the translations by Shakir, Irving ('the first American translation') and

Dawood are serviceable. In his latest edition, Dawood has put the surahs back in their canonical order. The so-called translations by Zafrulla Khan and Ahmed Ali should be studiously avoided. Several others, including those by Muhammad Asad, and Dr and Mrs Zidan, need to be read with caution. The reasons for this are explained in Appendix B, where you will also find information concerning the few passages where Yusuf Ali and Pickthall number the āyahs slightly differently from the standard Egyptian edition.

Part One

Phenomenology

I

The Qur'an as Experienced by Muslims

Motivated by the desire to understand Islam, our fictional hero acquired a translation of the Qur'an. The edition which he purchased was a Penguin Classic, one of a series of small black paperbacks which include well-known works of Greek, Latin, Russian and French literature translated into modern English – works such as Plato's *Republic*, Juvenal's *Satires*, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, to name just a few which I can see sitting on my own shelves. Yet for orthodox Muslims, the Qur'an is not a literary work. Nor, strictly speaking, can it be translated. It is God's final Word to humankind, vouchsafed to the Prophet Muhammad in pure Arabic. Since the Prophet was illiterate, the revelations were heard, memorized and recited before they were written down and assembled into a book. For these reasons, Muslims do not experience the Qur'an solely, or even primarily, as written Scripture. Listening, and learning to recite from memory, precede the effort to understand – and this notwithstanding the place which the Qur'an enjoys as *the* Book.

1.1 Listening to the Qur'an

The aural-oral nature of the revelation is apparent from the frequent occurrence of the singular imperative *qul*, 'Say!', which is found more than three hundred times in the Qur'an. In most instances it is addressed to Muhammad and introduces various elements of the message which he was to relay to his audience. Moreover the Arabic word *qur'ān* is derived from the verb *qara'a*, which means 'to read', but also has the connotations of 'to recite' or 'to proclaim'. According to tradition, the first part of the Qur'an to be revealed was the beginning of Surah 96, the very first word of which is *iqra'* ('Read!' or 'Recite!'), the imperative of this same verb. The Prophet's young wife Ayesha relates how, after he had begun to experience visions in his sleep, he took to making spiritual retreats in a cave on Mount Hirā', on the outskirts of Mecca. One night towards the end of the month of Ramaḍān, when he was alone in the cave, the angel Gabriel appeared to him in the form of a man.

The angel came and found him and said, 'Read!' – 'I can't read,' he answered. 'The angel immediately grabbed me,' related the Prophet, 'and squeezed me until I lost all my strength, and repeated the word "Read" – "I can't read," I answered again. For the third time the angel grabbed me and squeezed me until he had taken away all my strength. Then he released me saying,

> Read in the name of thy Lord who created.
> He created man from a blood clot.
> Read; and thy Lord is the most generous,
> He who has taught with the pen
> Taught man what he did not know.'[1]

Much is lost in my English rendering of the initial revelation, as I hope to show by comparing it with the Arabic which is given here in transliteration:

> *iqra' bismi rabbi-ka 'l-ladhī khalaq*
> *khalaqa 'l-insāna min ʿalaq*
> *iqra' wa-rabbu-ka 'l-akram*
> *al-ladhī ʿallama bi-'l-qalam*
> *ʿallama 'l-insāna mā lam yaʿlam*

First, it is immediately obvious that the original is characterized by rhyme. In fact the whole of the Qur'an is in rhymed or assonanced prose, and rhyme and assonance[2] are the basis for the subdivision of the surahs into āyahs. Second, although these five āyahs are of unequal length, there is a marked rhythm. Short of listening to a recitation, the easiest way to appreciate this is by counting the number of isochronic units.[3] If each short vowel is counted as one unit (1 s. = 1 i.u.), and if each long vowel – indicated in my transliteration by a bar above the letter (macron) – is counted as two (1 l. = 2 i.u.), we arrive at the following equations:

10 s. + 1 l. = 12 i.u.
8 s. + 1 l. = 10 i.u.
8 s. + 0 l. = 8 i.u.
8 s. + 1 l. = 10 i.u.
8 s. + 2 l. = 12 i.u.

There is thus a rhythmic symmetry, with the fifth āyah counterbalancing the first, and the fourth counterbalancing the second.

In addition to the rhyme and rhythm, which are largely lost in the translation, one should also note the very different range and distribution of consonants. In the translation, with the exception of *h* and *c*, all of the

consonants are formed in the middle or front of the mouth. The Arabic, on the other hand, has a high frequency of consonants which originate in the back of the mouth or the throat. These include: *k* (*kāf*), which is more or less the same as the English *k*; *kh* (*khā'*), which is the guttural *ch* as in Scottish 'loch'; *q* (*qāf*), which is like the English *k*, but pronounced as far back in the throat as possible;[4] the glottal stop ' (*hamza*), which occurs in standard English at the beginning of words such as '*a*wful' and '*a*bsolutely' when they are given particular emphasis; and ʿ (*ʿain*), a very strong guttural produced by compressing the throat and forcing up the larynx so that there is a feeling suggestive of slight retching.

Now let me make some simple observations about the distribution of the consonants. In the first two āyahs the rhyme words *khalaq* (created) and *ʿalaq*[5] (clot) are almost identical. The only difference between them is the initial consonant, which is in both cases a guttural. In Arabic, the relationship between the creation and the clot is thus underscored by the similarity of the two words.[6] Turning now to the fourth and fifth āyahs, note the similarity of the rhyme words *qalam* (pen) and *yaʿlam* (know), both to each other and to the verb *ʿallama* (he taught), a similarity which establishes a strong association between them. Note further that whereas the final three consonants in both āyahs one and two (*kh-l-q* and *ʿ-l-q*) originate in the back, middle and back of the mouth respectively, those in āyahs four and five (*q-l-m* and *ʿ-l-m*) originate in the back, middle and front. The fact that it is only the point of origin of the third consonant which differs radically, serves to highlight the contrast between the deep-throat *q*, which ends āyahs one and two, and the labial *m*, formed in the very front of the mouth, which ends āyah four and occurs no less than four times in āyah five. This shift from a preponderance of sounds originating in the throat to a preponderance of sounds issuing from the lips is highly appropriate in an oracle which encapsulates the onset of verbal revelation.

During Ramaḍān, Muslims flock to the mosque for the night prayers which are followed by extensive Qur'anic recitations. In the course of the month, they hear not just the first revelation but all 114 surahs in their canonical order, a thirtieth or more of the Qur'an being recited each night. It is beyond the scope of the present work to give a systematic account of the auditory qualities of the whole corpus. A few remarks must suffice. The first surah comprises seven brief āyahs, the first and third ending with the divine name *ar-Raḥīm*, 'the All-merciful', and the remainder having a final assonance in *-īn*.

bismillāhi 'r-raḥmāni 'r-raḥīm
al-ḥamdu li 'llāhi rabbi 'l-'ālamīn (1.1f.).

Then comes Surah 2 with 286 āyahs and Surah 3 with 200. Together they constitute an eighth of the Qur'an. The most common assonances in both these surahs are *-ūn* and *-īn*, which are considered interchangeable.[7] 75% of the āyahs in Surah 2 end in this way. For Surah 3 the figure is 60%. Most of the other āyahs end in words of the form *fa'īl*[8] – *'alīm*, 'all-knowing'; *ḥakīm*, 'All-wise'; *qadīr*, 'All-powerful'; and so forth – or with words ending in a long vowel followed by a consonant:

inna 'l-ladhīna kafarū sawā'an 'alay-him a-andharta-hum am lam tun-dhir-hum / lā yu'minūn.
khatama 'llāhu 'alā qulūbi-him wa-'alā sam'i-him / wa-'alā abṣāri-him ghishāwah / wa-lahum 'adhābun 'aẓīm (2.6f.).

The āyahs in Surah 2 range in length from 1 to 15 lines of the Arabic text, and are on average 2.44 lines long. None of the āyahs in Surah 3 is longer than 4 lines, and the average length is 2.04. The combined effect of the increase in the frequency of āyahs with non-standard assonances, and the decrease in the average length of the āyahs, is to produce a slight acceleration in what is still a fairly leisurely tempo.

After an interlude marked by Surah 4 (in which most of the āyahs end in words of the form *fa'īlā*[9]), Surah 5 reverts to the typical pattern encountered in Surahs 2 and 3. This pattern predominates until the end of Surah 66, with further interludes marked by Surahs 13, 17–20, 25, 33, 47–48, 50, 53–55 and 65. Surah 13 has assonance in *-ā* plus a consonant. Surah 17 is the first to exhibit true rhyme, with most of the āyahs ending in either *-īlā* or *-īrā*. Surah 18 has assonance in *-ā*. Surah 19.2–74 has assonance in *-iyyā*, whereas 19.75–98 rhymes in *-dā* and *-zā*. Surah 20 has assonances in *-ā* and *-ī*. Surah 25 resembles Surah 17. Surah 47 is unique in having assonances in *-hum* and *-kum*.[10] Surah 48 resembles Surah 4. Surah 50 has assonances of the form *fa'īl* and *fa'ūl*, the majority rhyming in *-d*. Surah 53 has assonance in *-ā*. Surah 54 rhymes in *-ar*, *-ir*, and *-ur*. Surah 55 is unique in having assonance in *-ān*.[11] Finally Surah 65.1–10 rhymes in *-rā*. The impression is therefore one of a progressive increase in the variety of assonance and rhyme.

From Surah 67 onwards – that is, in approximately the last seventeenth of the Qur'an – the state of affairs which we have observed so far is reversed. In other words the non-typical assonances and rhymes predominate, with brief interludes now marked by what I previously called

the typical pattern.[12] The surahs soon become much shorter, as do the āyahs of which they are composed. There is an increase in the number of rhymes formed with a short *-a* followed by a consonant (including *-at*, *-ad*, *-ak*, and *-aq*) which were not encountered earlier. Occasionally there is also alliteration – for instance 91.14b *fa-damdama 'alay-him rabbu-hum bi-dhambi-him fa-sawwā-hā* ('So their Lord crushed them for their sin and inflicted equal punishment on them')[13] – and even onomatopoeia, as in the description of Satan as *al-waswasi 'l-khanāsi 'l-ladhī yuwaswisu fī ṣudūri 'n-nās*[14] ('the slinking whisperer who whispers in the breasts of man', 114.5). The effect created by these phenomena is a heightened sense of excitement and urgency as the Qur'an draws rapidly to a close. Because of this, it is the practice in some mosques to complete the recitation of the Qur'an on the twenty-seventh night of Ramaḍān, the date which is often identified as *Laylat al-Qadar*, 'the Night of Power' on which the first revelation occurred.[15] Thus some of the most awe-inspiring surahs, including the first revelation, are recited on this most awe-inspiring of nights.

The nightly sessions in Ramaḍān are not the only occasions on which Muslims meet to listen to the Qur'an. In many mosques there are extensive recitations every week either before or after the Friday congregational prayers, and in some there are special reunions at other times to listen to a series of skilled reciters. In addition, wealthy patrons may invite their friends to their homes for the same purpose. Thus although listening to the Qur'an is first and foremost an act of devotion, to the connoisseur it is also to some extent a form of entertainment. It is therefore appropriate in this context to say something about the art of recitation. It should be evident, from my discussion of the gutturals in Surah 96.1–5, that the differences in the sounds represented by Arabic consonants is sometimes extremely subtle. The English reader may be comforted to learn that some of these subtleties pose problems even for native speakers of Arabic. For instance, in Lower Egypt and the towns of the Levant, *qāf* (*q*) is normally pronounced like *hamza* ('), and in many regions *hamza* is not pronounced except at the beginning of a word. Similar problems arise with the voiced dentals *dhāl* (*dh*), *ḍād* (*ḍ*), and *ẓā'* (*ẓ*), which natives of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula pronounce almost identically.[16] Thus in order to recite the Qur'an correctly it is necessary to expend considerable time and effort acquiring the correct pronunciation. The Prophet is reported to have said, 'Adorn the Qur'an with recitation, and ornament it with your best voices.'[17] For this reason the art of recitation is known as *tajwīd* – literally 'making good' – and involves a number of refinements

not found in normal speech: the addition of a half vowel after *q*, *d*, *t* and *i* to make them resonate when they close a syllable,[18] the artificial lengthening of some vowels, the nasalization of some consonants and the assimilation of others.[19] There are three standard modes of recitation: *ḥadr*, the rapid mode which corresponds to normal talking speed; *tartīl*, which is slow; and *tadwīr*, which is at a medium pace. Finally, although it is forbidden to set the Qur'an to a preconceived melody – for this would involve making the Word of God subordinate to the dictates of music – a recitation is nonetheless a musical performance, the reciter improvising in such a way as to highlight the innate musical qualities of the revelation.[20]

1.2 Having the Qur'an by heart

For a devout Muslim, the rhythm of routine existence is determined by *ṣalāt*, the ritual prayer, of which Qur'anic recitation is an integral part. *Ṣalāt* is performed five times a day, beginning with the dawn prayer before sunrise and concluding with the night prayer, which is usually completed before midnight. The basic unit of prayer is called a *rak'ah* (literally a 'bending'). It consists of a sequence of movements accompanied by Qur'anic recitations and the repetition of various set formulae in Arabic. On a normal day, a Muslim who observes all five prayer times will perform a total of seventeen compulsory *rak'ahs* and up to thirty-one additional ones. In the course of each *rak'ah*, he stands upright, bends from the waist, stands upright again, prostrates himself, sits upright, prostrates himself a second time, and returns to the sitting position.[21] In the initial standing position he recites the *fātiḥah*, the opening surah of the Qur'an:

> In the name of Allah the Most-merciful the All-merciful
> Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds
> the Most-merciful the All-merciful
> the Master of the Day of Recompense.
> Thee only do we worship; Thee only do we ask for help.
> Guide us in the straight path,
> the path of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy favour
> not of those with whom Thou art angry and who have gone astray.

An additional passage, comprising a minimum of three āyahs, should be recited immediately after the *fātiḥah* in the first two compulsory *rak'ahs* and in each of the additional *rak'ahs*. The passages selected may be from

anywhere in the Qur'an, provided that the canonical sequence is respected.[22]

The set formulae which accompany the prayer postures all have a Qur'anic ring about them. For instance although the exclamation *Allāhu aKBaR* 'Allah is greater!', which is uttered at the beginning of the prayers and at the transition from one posture to the next, does not occur in the Qur'an in this precise form, it is reminiscent of the Qur'anic assertions that 'acceptance from Allah is greater' (9.72), 'remembrance of Allah is greater' (29.45) and 'Allah's hatred is greater' (40.10), and the injunction to magnify Allah greatly (*KaBbiRa-hu taKBīRā*, 17.111). The formula 'Glory be to my Lord the Tremendous', which the worshipper repeats under his breath at least three times in the bending position, is based on a Qur'anic injunction (56.74, 96; 69.52), as is the slightly different formula, 'Glory be to my Lord the Most High', which he repeats in each prostration (87.1; cf. 92.20; 79.24). The words spoken in the sitting position of some of the *rak'ahs* are likewise rooted in the Qur'an. They include the testimony that 'there is no deity but Allah' (37.35; 47.19, etc.) and that 'Muhammad is His servant and His messenger' (cf. 53.10; 48.29), and the calling down of blessings upon him (cf. 33.56). In the final sitting of the last *rak'ah*, with his hands held palms upward in supplication, the worshipper petitions Allah. Here he is free to express himself in his own words, although it is preferable to choose one of several set forms. One which is very frequently employed is a prayer which the Qur'an attributes to Abraham:

> O Lord! make me and my offspring steadfast in prayer. O our Lord! accept my supplication. O our Lord! forgive me and my parents and the believers on the day when the reckoning shall come to pass! (14.40f.)

For *ṣalāt* to be valid, the Qur'an must be recited from memory in Arabic. It is possible to fulfil one's obligations by knowing only the *fātiḥah* and a few other passages. A selection of short surahs from the end of the Qur'an are usually learnt for this purpose. However, many Muslims endeavour to memorize much more than this. It is a widespread practice for children, some as young as seven years of age, to attend a Qur'an class after school each day. There, squatting on the floor, their books resting on low wooden benches, they work at their own pace, reading or reciting aloud, each awaiting his turn to go up and be tested by the instructor. The first stage is to learn to pronounce each of the twenty-nine consonants of the Arabic alphabet in conjunction with the three short vowels and the

three long vowels: *ba*, *bi*, *bu*, *bā*, *bī*, *bū*; *ta*, *ti*, *tu*, *tā*, *tī*, *tū*, and so on. The next step is to learn to read whole words. After this the student works his way through the Qur'an. Only when he has read it from beginning to end and mastered the pronunciation does he attempt to commit passages to memory. At the end of three years some will have learned only a few short surahs, but others will know the whole Qur'an by heart and will have earned the coveted title of *ḥāfiẓ*. It is perhaps not surprising that some of the great figures from the past, such as the Persian philosopher Ibn Sīna (Avicenna), achieved this goal at an early age.[23] Similar feats of memory are, however, performed today by school-children living in the deprived inner-city areas of Britain.

To learn the Qur'an by heart is one thing; to retain it is quite another. For as the Prophet warned, 'it can slip away from you more easily than camels can escape the cords with which they are hobbled'.[24] The celebrated Egyptian writer Taha Hussein, who finished learning the Qur'an when he was barely nine, recounts how his father humiliated him by asking him to recite the Surah of the Poets a few months later:

> All that he could remember of 'The Surah of the Poets' was that it was one of three which began with Ṭā Sīn Mīm, so he began to repeat Ṭā Sīn Mīm over and over again, without being able to arrive at what came after it. His father prompted him by telling him some of the words which followed, but in spite of that he could not proceed at all. So his father said, 'Recite the Surah of the Ant, then.' Now he remembered that this Surah, like that of the Poets, began with Ṭā Sīn Mīm and he began to repeat this phrase. Again his father helped him, but he could not make any progress … So his father said, 'Recite the Surah of the Stories, then.' He remembered that this was the third which began with Ṭā Sīn Mīm, and he began to repeat it again, but this time his father did not prompt him at all. Instead he said quietly, 'Go! I thought that you had learnt the Qur'an?'[25]

The following day, his teacher rebuked him and began to instruct him all over again like a beginner. With application, however, he soon relearned all that he had forgotten, and passed a stringent test put to him by his father. But that was not the end of the matter. After an unspecified period of time, he was examined again, but without warning. One afternoon, when the lad absent-mindedly returned from the mosque without his shoes, his father asked him to recite the Surah of Sheba.

> Now our friend had forgotten the Surah of Sheba with all the other

> Surahs, nor did God help him at all. The sheikh said, 'Well, recite the Surah of the Creator.'. Still God did not help him to speak. So the sheikh said gently and mockingly, 'You averred that you still knew the Qur'an properly. All right, recite Surah Yā Sīn.' God helped him to recite the first verses of this Surah, but after that he became tongue-tied, and the saliva in his mouth dried up. A terrible quivering took hold of him followed by cold sweat pouring down his face.
>
> Then the sheikh said quietly, 'Get up! Try not to forget your shoes every day. As far as I can see you have lost them just as you have lost your knowledge of the Qur'an.'[26]

After that he was taught the Qur'an privately by a tutor who came to his home.

Despite Taha Hussein's unhappy experience, it is possible, by discipline and determination, to keep the Qur'an fresh in one's memory. This is best done by reading it through once a week or, failing that, once a month. To facilitate this practice, some editions have medallions in the margins to divide the text into seven parts of approximately equal length, and most have medallions to indicate the division into thirtieths. I have had the opportunity of testing two young Muslims who were reputed to know the whole Qur'an by heart and was unable to fault either of them. They were both British Asians born in Pakistan but residing in England. The first was an eighteen-year-old apprentice electrician whom I tested informally in my study in Bradford. The second was a fourteen-year-old schoolboy whom I tested while he was being filmed in a Leeds mosque. When I read an āyah picked at random, both were able to recite the following ten āyahs. I repeated this process with half a dozen passages from different parts of the Qur'an, and never met with the slightest hesitation.

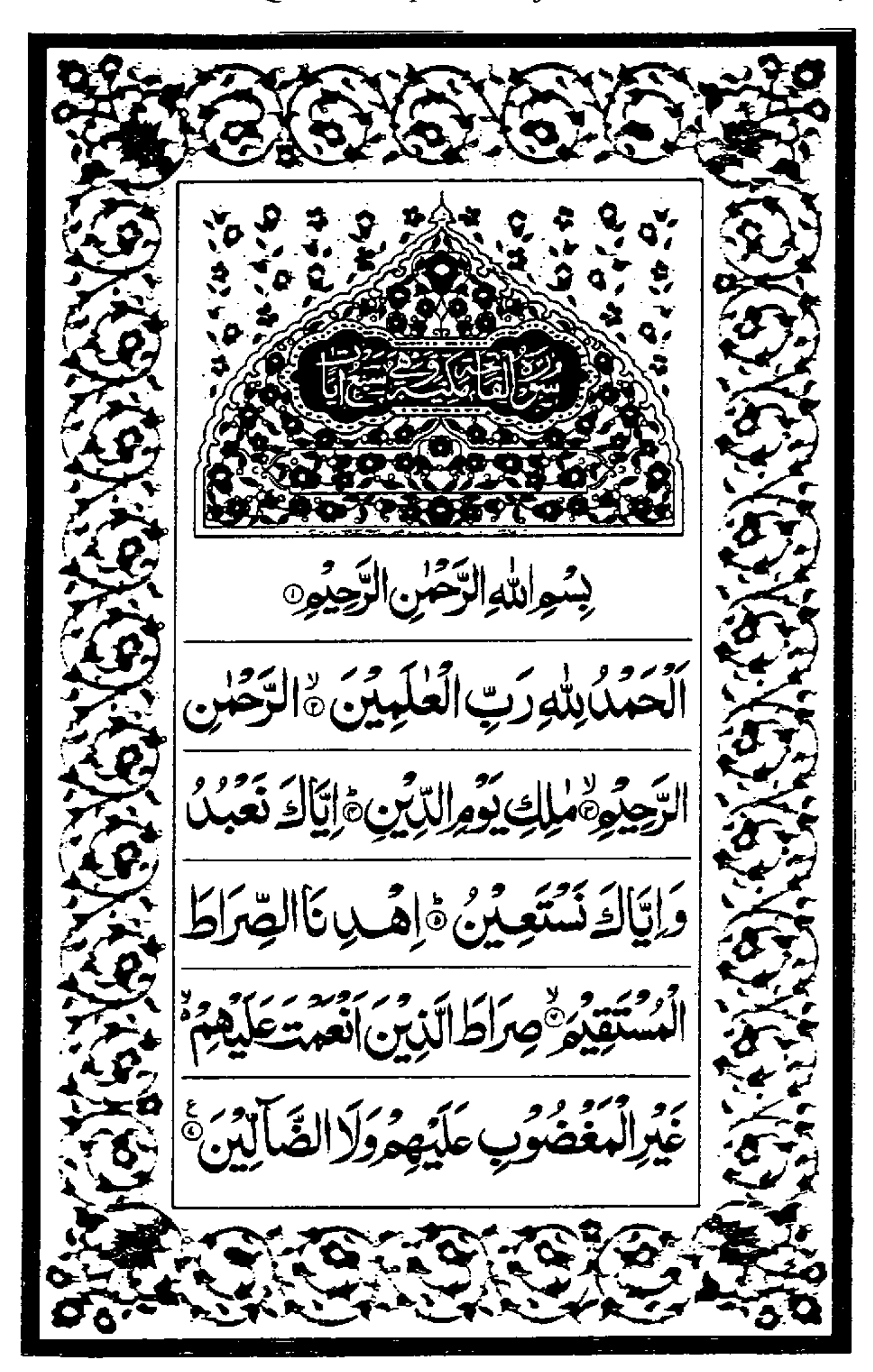
1.3 The Qur'an in everyday life

Comparatively few have the determination to learn the whole Qur'an by heart. Even fewer have the talent or the opportunity to perfect their recitation so as to reproduce 'that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy'.[27] Many get no further than memorizing half a dozen short surahs well enough to recite them falteringly in their prayers. How does the Qur'an impinge on the everyday lives of ordinary Muslims like them? Modern technology has greatly increased the opportunities for hearing high-quality recitation throughout the year.

Recitation was first heard on the radio in 1934[28] and is now a regular feature of broadcasting throughout the Muslim world. Moreover, complete recordings of the Qur'an by famous reciters such as the Egyptian Mahmud Khalīl al-Husarī and the Pakistani Ghulam Raṣul are readily available on cassettes. Before the advent of the radio and the cassette recorder, however, the Qur'an had already left an indelible impression on the Arabic language, and Qur'anic expressions had passed untranslated into the everyday speech of non-Arab Muslims, who outnumber Arabs by about seven to one. For instance, the Muslim greeting *as-salāmu 'alaykum*, which is Arabic for 'Peace be upon you', may be heard the world over. In the Qur'an the Prophet is urged to use this formula when greeting believers (6.54), and it is said that the angels will address them in the same words when they enter Paradise (13.24; 16.32). Equally ubiquitous is the expression *in shā' Allāh* ('if Allah wills') which pious Muslims utter every time they declare their intention of doing anything. According to the Qur'an it was spoken by Abraham's son (37.102), Joseph (12.99), Moses (18.69), his future father-in-law (28.27), and the Israelites during the period in the wilderness (2.70). It also occurs in promises, and statements about God's future actions, which are addressed to Muhammad's contemporaries (6.41; 9.28; 33.24; 48.27). The exclamation *mā shā' Allāh* (literally 'what Allah willed!'), which is used to express surprise or congratulations, is likewise Qur'anic (6.128; 7.188; 10.49; 18.39; 87.7). So too is *al-ḥamdu li-'llāh* ('Praise be to Allah', 1.2, etc.), which may be heard in a variety of contexts.

Of all the Qur'anic expressions heard on the lips of Muslims, the most common is the *bismillah*: *bismillāhi 'r-raḥmāni 'r-raḥīm* ('In the name of Allah the Most-merciful the All-merciful'). In addition to being the first āyah of the *fātiḥah* (1.1), it occurs at the head of all the other surahs except one, and it is said to have been employed by Solomon in a letter to the Queen of Sheba (27.30). It is used as a grace before eating or drinking, and is often uttered on entering a room, opening a book or undertaking almost any activity. The one notable exception is the slaughter of animals, when the shorter phrase 'In the name of Allah' is employed. Because of this, and because the *bismillah* is not found at the head of Surah 9, in which the Muslims are called to fight against the Meccan idolaters, Muslim piety sees in its frequent repetition a reminder that man was not created for killing and torment, but rather for mercy and good recompense.[29]

The *fātiḥah* in its entirety is also used very widely outside the set prayers, and no formal occasion would be complete without it. The Prophet is reputed to have said that anyone who recites it will gain as



سورة الفاتحة مكية وهي سبع آيات

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ ﴿١﴾

اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ﴿٢﴾ الرَّحْمٰنِ

الرَّحِيْمِ ﴿٣﴾ مٰلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّيْنِ ﴿٤﴾ اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ

وَاِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ ﴿٥﴾ اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ

الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ ﴿٦﴾ صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّآلِّيْنَ ﴿٧﴾

Illuminated text of the *fātiḥah*

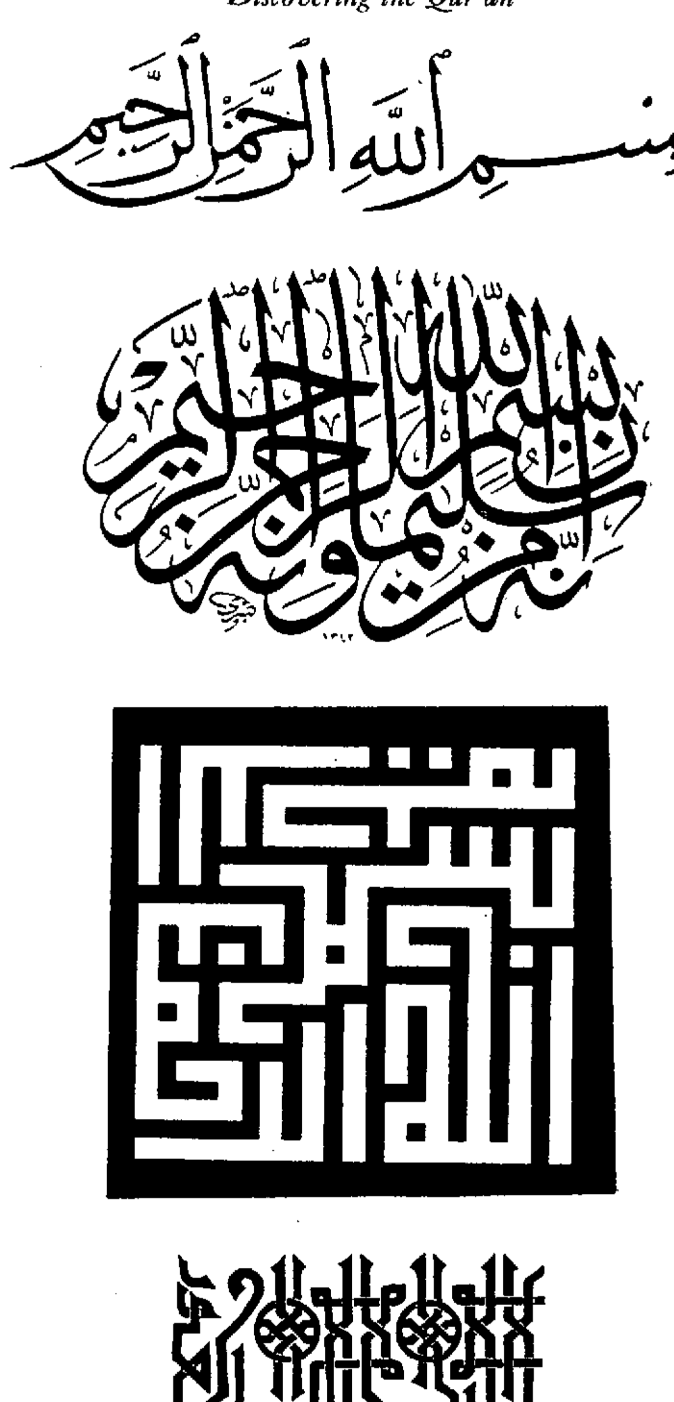
much merit as if he had recited two thirds of the Qur'an.[30] There are in fact many sayings attributed to the Prophet about the virtues of reciting various surahs or parts of surahs. In practice, after the *fātiḥah*, pride of place goes to the last two āyahs of Surah 2 (which are used as a prayer for forgiveness before retiring to bed), Surah 36, and Surah 112. Surah 36, called Yā Sīn after the two letters of the Arabic alphabet with which it begins, is recited on *laylat nisf ash-sha'bān*, the night half-way through the month of Sha'bān when it is believed that the heavenly tree of life is shaken, shedding the leaves of those who will die in the course of the coming year. It is also recited at funerals and to the dying. The Scandinavian traveller Knud Holmboe described how, when imprisoned in Libya on a charge of spying, he encountered six ragged Arabs 'whose faces shone with a sublime calm' as they listened in rapt attention to this surah, despite the fact that they were likely to be shot the next day.[31] Surah 112, known as *sūrat al-ikhlās* ('the Surah of Sincerity') because of its uncompromising affirmation of the absolute unity of God, may be repeated to gain blessings on one's own behalf or on behalf of others. In a rite known in Urdu as *isāl-i sawāb*, which is performed by many Muslims from the Indian subcontinent, the *fātiḥah* is recited once and Surah 112 three times in the hope that the merits accruing from the recitation will be attributed to a person who has recently departed.[32]

I have stressed the aural-oral aspects of the Muslim experience of the Qur'an in order to correct the common assumption that it is simply a book. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that the first revelation celebrates the generosity of Muhammad's Lord who taught man *with the pen*, and we shall see in subsequent chapters that Muhammad probably envisaged the production of a written edition of the Qur'an, although the task was probably not completed in his lifetime. Be that as it may, the written Word now plays an important part in Islam. Because of the prohibition of the visual representation of animate forms, Muslim artists have long found an outlet for their creative energy in calligraphy. Throughout the Islamic world, mosques and public buildings are adorned with quotations from the Qur'an, whether carved in wood, stone or stucco, engraved on metal, painted on tiles, or composed of glazed bricks. In shops, offices and private houses one may see calligraphic panels written with brush or reed pen, created by marquetry, or mass-produced in moulded metal or plastic. A dozen or more styles of writing are commonly encountered. They range from the easy-to-read *muḥaqqaq* and *naskhī* scripts, through the structured *jalī thuluth* with its elegant tangle of superimposed words, to the maze-like patterns of squares and linked

rectangles of 'square Kufic'. The mosque inscriptions draw on a wealth of different passages from the Qur'an, with a general preference for āyahs which assert God's unity, extol His generosity, wisdom and power, and call on Muslims to be steadfast in prayer. Inscriptions on or in other public edifices often have āyahs which have a bearing on the purpose for which they were built. For instance, a school might have, 'Say, "Allah increase me in knowledge"' (20.114); a hospital, 'We reveal by means of the Qur'an what is a healing and a mercy to the believers' (17.82); and a parliament, 'whose rule is consultation among themselves' (42.38). On ships one sometimes reads Noah's words, 'Embark in it! In Allah's name shall be its course and its berthing' (11.41), and written over the entrance hall of Cairo's international airport are Joseph's words of greeting to his parents when he was at last reunited with them, 'Enter into Egypt, if Allah wills, in security' (12.99). Inside shops and houses, the selection is usually more restricted, with a handful of āyahs being found over and over again. These are the *fātiḥah*; 'There is no god but Allah' (37.35) together with 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah' (48.29); Surah 112; the 'throne verse' (2.255), whose fifty words each contain fifty blessings;[33] 'Allah grants sustenance to whom He wills without reckoning' (2.212); and Solomon's words on being brought the Queen of Sheba's throne, 'This is of the bounty of my Lord' (27.40).

Passages from the Qur'an are sometimes copied out and used for superstitious practices, especially by Muslims from the more backward rural areas. For instance Surahs 113 and 114, which are prayers for protection from evil, are worn as amulets. So too are Jacob's words to his sons when reluctantly entrusting Benjamin to them, 'But Allah is the best protector, and He is the most merciful of those who show mercy' (12.64). In Egypt, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Lane observed that 'the most approved mode of charming away sickness or disease' was for various āyahs which mention healing – for instance Abraham's words 'When I am sick He heals me' (26.80) – to be written on the inside of an earthenware pot. Water was then poured into the pot and stirred until the writing dissolved, and the potion was administered to the patient.[34] Similar practices are occasionally encountered today amongst Mirpuri Muslims in Britain, although the āyahs are now written on slips of paper in washable ink.[35]

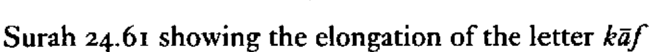
Written copies of the Qur'an are generally treated with immense respect. The statement that it is a book 'which none shall touch save those who are clean' (56.79) is often taken to mean that it should only be handled by those who have performed ablutions. It should never be placed on the floor and it is usually wrapped or kept in a box when not in



Different styles of calligraphy

use.[36] Before reading from the Qur'an, as when reciting from memory, a Muslim says, 'I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Satan' (cf. 16.98), and on completion of his reading he says, 'Allah the Mighty has spoken the truth'. The usual practice is to read out aloud. To help the reader, signs representing the vowels are printed above and below the consonants.[37] Moreover there are other signs indicating where it is permissible to pause, and drawing the reader's attention to some of the finer points of pronunciation such as the fact that *n* before *b* is pronounced *m*. Despite this profusion of diacritical marks, a page of the Qur'an often has an aesthetic appeal which cannot be reproduced in Roman script. For example 24.61 lists those in whose homes it is permissible to eat. In English it appears simply to be a list of relatives: 'your father ... your mother ... your brothers, etc.' In the Arabic text, however, there is often an impression of movement and life produced by the elongated bellies and slanted necks of the letter *kāf* (*k*) which appears again and again in the suffix -*kum*, meaning 'your'.

سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٠﴾ لَيْسَ عَلَى ٱلْأَعْمَىٰ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى ٱلْأَعْرَجِ
حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى ٱلْمَرِيضِ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَن تَأْكُلُوا۟
مِنۢ بُيُوتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ ءَابَآئِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أُمَّهَـٰتِكُمْ
أَوْ بُيُوتِ إِخْوَٰنِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَخَوَٰتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ
أَعْمَـٰمِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ عَمَّـٰتِكُمْ أَوْ بُيُوتِ أَخْوَٰلِكُمْ
أَوْ بُيُوتِ خَـٰلَـٰتِكُمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكْتُم مَّفَاتِحَهُۥٓ
أَوْ صَدِيقِكُمْ ۚ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَن تَأْكُلُوا۟
جَمِيعًا أَوْ أَشْتَاتًا ۚ فَإِذَا دَخَلْتُم بُيُوتًا فَسَلِّمُوا۟ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ
تَحِيَّةً مِّنْ عِندِ ٱللَّهِ مُبَـٰرَكَةً طَيِّبَةً ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ
يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمُ ٱلْـَٔايَـٰتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦١﴾



Surah 24.61 showing the elongation of the letter *kāf*

What I have said about the respect which ordinary Muslims show for the Qur'an, and about the dynamic appearance of the written text, is epitomized in this extract from a meditation by Hasan Askari. He was moved to write it when a young friend of his told him about his mother. The mother had never been taught how to read, yet before dawn she would rise and kindle a lamp, unfurl her prayer mat and remove her Qur'an from its green silk wrapping.

> For a long time she would allow her eyes to rest on the two open pages before her. The letters in green ink from right to left, row beneath row, each shape mysteriously captivating, each dot above or below a letter an epitome of the entire scripture, each assembly of letters a group of dervishes raising their hands in zikr, each gap between two enigmatic shapes a leap from this world into the next, and each ending the advent of the day of Resurrection.
>
> She would thus see a thousand images in the procession of that script and would move from vision to vision.
>
> After spending much time in just looking at the open book, she would then, with strange light glowing on her face, lift her right hand and with the right finger start touching the letters of each line, then another line, to the end of the page. What transpired between the book and that touch, and what knowledge passed, without any mediation of conscious thought, directly into her soul, only the Qur'an and the strange reciter could know. The entire world stood still at this amazing recital without words, without meaning, without knowledge. With that touch a unity was established between her and the Qur'an. At that moment she had passed into a state of total identity with the word of God. Her inability to read the scripture was her ability to hear once again: Read! Read, in the name of thy Lord.[38]

Part Two

Chronology

2

Anchoring the Revelations in Space and Time

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, we saw that the 114 surahs are arranged approximately in decreasing order of length and that what is generally deemed to be the earliest of the revelations – the first part of Surah 96 – thus occurs near the end of the corpus. It was argued that, when viewed in the light of the time-honoured practice of reciting the whole Qur'an in the month of Ramaḍān, this arrangement makes liturgical sense. Nevertheless, although the surahs are not in chronological order, it is generally agreed that knowledge of the circumstances in which they were revealed has a bearing on their interpretation. In Chapter 4, we shall see that there is a wealth of traditional material which purports to furnish the relevant information. Most Muslims, however, do not derive their conviction that the Qur'an is firmly anchored in space and time from this technical literature, but from biographies of Muhammad. This chapter will therefore be devoted to exploring the relationship between the Qur'an and the earliest extant biographies, on which all modern biographies of the Prophet are based. I shall begin with a discussion of the Prophet's miracles, in order to demonstrate why one should be cautious about reading the Qur'an in the light of biographical traditions. Then, I propose to comb the Qur'an itself for clues concerning the provenance and date of the revelations. Having done this, I shall outline the development of the biographical genre and explain why, in my view, it is not unreasonable to expect the extant biographies to yield reliable information about the dates of key events, particularly those which occurred during the last decade of the Prophet's life. Finally, I shall attempt, on the basis of these biographies, to construct a plausible chronological framework in which to view the revelations.

2.2 The miracles attributed to the Prophet

The Qur'an mentions several miracles, or 'signs' as it calls them, which previous prophets performed by Allah's permission. For instance, it narrates how Moses' staff turned into a serpent (7.107) and how Jesus created birds from clay, healed the blind and raised the dead (3.49). It seems to imply, however, that although Muhammad's contemporaries were clamouring for signs of this sort, none was forthcoming.

> And those who disbelieve say, 'Why has a sign not been sent down to him from his Lord?' (13.7).

> It is not for any prophet to bring a sign other than by Allah's permission (13.38).

> They swear their strongest oaths by Allah that if a sign came to them they would surely believe in it. Say, 'Signs are with Allah, and what will make you [Muslims] perceive that if [a sign] came they would not believe?' (7.109).[1]

The only miracle which was vouchsafed to him was the Qur'an itself, which the unbelievers are challenged to imitate (2.23, etc.), and which itself contained 'signs' or āyahs (24.1; 31.2; 41.3).[2]

Popular biographies of the Prophet, on the other hand, relate that Muhammad performed numerous miracles. They allege that he had his prayers for the onset or cessation of rain immediately answered; that he fed a large company with food hardly adequate for a single person; that he made the dry udders of goats distend with milk; that he produced water for his troops to drink or perform their ablutions; that he split the moon in two; and that he completed the 1600-mile journey to Jerusalem and back in the space of a single night.

The Qur'an does admittedly mention both the splitting of the moon and a mysterious night journey, but in neither case does it give sufficient detail to warrant the assumption that the occurrences were genuinely miraculous, or that they were perceived as such by Muhammad's contemporaries. The passage about the moon reads as follows:

> The hour has drawn near and the moon is split (54.1).

According to tradition it was split into two pieces, which were clearly visible on either side of a hill, but that is not what is said here. There are two plausible explanations of the Qur'anic text. The first is that when Muhammad pointed to a partial eclipse of the moon as a sign of the

coming judgment, the unbelievers were unimpressed. In that case the following āyah must be translated thus:

> And if they see a sign they avoid it, and say 'Continuous magic!' (54.2).

Alternatively, and I think rather more probably, the first āyah describes an apocalyptic sign which still lies in the future, but the perfect tense is used to express the certainty that the moon *will* split. In that case the second āyah must be translated:

> But if they were to see a sign they would avoid it and say 'Continuous magic!'

What the Qur'an relates about the night journey is also tantalizingly brief:

> Glory be to Him who caused His servant to travel by night from the inviolable place of worship to the furthest place of worship, the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him some of Our signs ... (17.1).

The reference is undoubtedly to a profound religious experience, but the precise details are far from clear. 'His servant' is almost certainly Muhammad, and the expression 'the inviolable place of worship' probably denotes the precincts of the Ka'bah in Mecca, but nothing is said about a winged mount, half-mule half-donkey, on which the Prophet rode to Jerusalem and back in a single night, or about his ascent through the seven heavens where he communed with earlier prophets. Nor, for that matter, does the Qur'an relate how he proved that his story was true by accurately describing a caravan which he had passed on the return journey. Finally, can we be sure that 'the furthest place of worship' was actually the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, as tradition unanimously maintains? I shall argue in Chapter 9 that this last detail seems to be borne out by a painstaking analysis of Surah 17 as a whole. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that Jerusalem is never explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, and that it was not conquered by the Arabs until after Muhammad's death. Moreover, its importance as a pilgrimage centre for Muslims probably dates from CE 691, when the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock to assert his independence from the rebel leader Ibn az-Zubayr who had seized control of Mecca.[3]

The striking difference between what can be safely inferred from the Qur'an itself and what has frequently been read into it presents me with a serious dilemma. In the last chapter, I made a concerted effort to

convey to the reader how the Qur'an is experienced by Muslims. Ought I not, therefore, to continue in the same vein and draw on the biographies uncritically, so as to explain how the Qur'an is often understood by ordinary Muslims? If I were writing a book on popular Islam, I would have chosen that path. As I am more concerned with the Qur'an in its own right, I have chosen a different one.

2.3 Combing the Qur'an for clues to its provenance

If one approaches the Qur'an without any preconceptions based on subsequent tradition, one discovers that it contains very few clues to help to determine the provenance of the revelations with any accuracy. The fact that the revelations are in Arabic suggests that they originated somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula.[4] The references to camels, bedouin, sand dunes, desert storms and date-palms, as well as to deities worshipped by the pagan Arabs, seem to bear this out, but they hardly help us to be more specific, although the frequent mention of ships is perhaps more telling. A handful of places – Yathrib (33.13), Becca (3.96), Mecca (48.24), 'Arafāt (2.198), Badr (3.123), Ḥunayn (9.25) and al-Ḥijr (15.80) – are referred to by name, without any indication of their precise location. To these may be added al-Madīnah (9.101, 120; 33.60; 63.8) and Umm al-Qurā (6.92; 42.7), which mean 'the City' and 'the Mother of Towns' respectively. There are two references to 'the Ka'bah' (5.95, 97), which is also called 'the sacred house' (5.2, 97). It seems to be identical with 'the house' built by Abraham, which is in the vicinity of 'Safā and Marwā' (2.125–8, 158; cf. 22.26; 106.3). This 'house' is obviously a shrine within 'the inviolable place of worship', which is referred to as a centre of pilgrimage and sanctuary (2.144, 149, 191, 196, 217; 5.2; 8.34; 9.7, 19, 28; 22.25; 48.24–7).

Names of people who were alive at the time of the revelations are even rarer than toponyms. The Quraysh – who are bidden to worship 'the Lord of this house' (106.1–3) – are mentioned just once. So too are Abū Lahab (111.1) – about whom we can deduce very little apart from his wealth, his married status and his being destined to hellfire – and Zayd (33.37), who was apparently the adopted son of the messenger who received the revelations. It is a reasonable inference that the messenger was none other than Muhammad. Curiously, however, this name occurs only four times (3.144; 33.40; 47.2; 48.29) and is never used when the messenger is addressed. There is a good deal of information about the messenger and the opposition with which he met, but none of it is very

specific.[5] We may glean that he was an orphan (93.6) who had originally been poor (93.8), that he began to receive revelations relatively late in life (10.16), was expelled from his own town (47.13), emigrated and married several women (33.50), but remained without male heir (33.40; cf. 108.3).

The situation is not quite as bleak as might appear from this brief inventory of the Qur'anic data. Two Surahs, 33 and 48, yield rather more clues than most, and therefore merit closer attention. Let us discuss them in turn. Surah 33 mentions 'the Emigrants' (v.6), 'Yathrib' (v.13), 'Muhammad' (v.40) and al-Madīnah (v.60). The opening section, vv.1–8, warns the Prophet not to defer to the unbelievers and hypocrites, and implies his high status by mentioning him in the same breath as Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The issues over which he was evidently at odds seem to have included divorce, adoption, the nature of the bond between the Emigrants and the [other] believers, his status and the status of his wives. The next section, vv.9–27, reminds the believers of Allah's mercy on them. There had been a concerted attack on Yathrib by a confederation of tribes while the Prophet had been present. The attack had struck fear in the believers' hearts and the hypocrites had fled from the scene of the fighting. Allah had, however, repulsed the attack, and once the siege lifted he had expelled the treacherous People of the Scripture. In the third section, vv.37–60, the themes adumbrated in vv.1–8 are dealt with in more detail. Note in particular the explicit mention of Muhammad:

> Muhammad is not the Father of any of your men but the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets (33.40).

This refers back to v.6, which affirms that despite the extremely strong bond between the Prophet and the believers, that bond does not amount to kinship. Note too v.60, with its warning to the hypocrites and alarmists in al-Madīnah. This refers back to v.1 but also to vv.12f. The implication is that, in view of the hypocrites' behaviour during the siege, they were lucky not to have been expelled along with the treacherous People of the Scripture, and that if they continued to oppose the Prophet they would certainly share their fate. Thus, if Surah 33 is treated as a unity, we may reasonably infer from it that al-Madīnah – 'the City' – is identical with Yathrib; that the Prophet Muhammad went there as an emigrant; and that there was a strong bond between him and the indigenous believers, despite the absence of any blood relationship.

The other key surah for our purpose is 48, or more specifically 48.18–27. These ten āyahs indicate that the believers pledged their

allegiance to Muhammad, but that their subsequent attempt to gain access to the inviolable place of worship was thwarted by the unbelievers who confronted them in the middle of Mecca. It does not actually say that the inviolable place of worship itself was in Mecca, but this is a plausible inference.

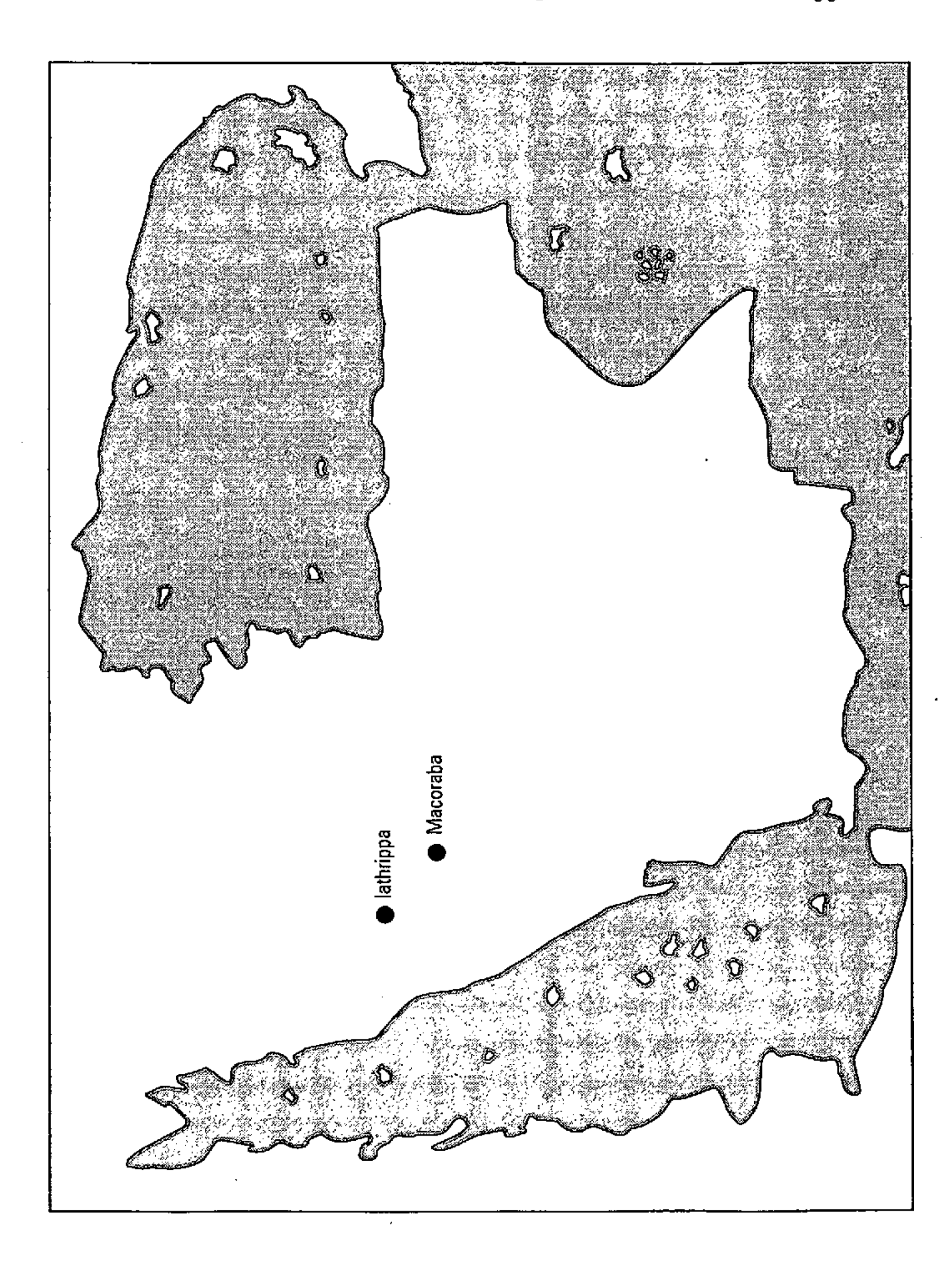
We have established on the basis of Surahs 33 and 48 that al-Madīnah and Yathrib are identical, that the Qur'an links Muhammad with both Yathrib and Mecca, and that it probably locates the inviolable place of worship in the latter. But is there any evidence that the Qur'anic Yathrib and Mecca had the same geographical location as al-Madīnah and Mecca in present-day Saudi Arabia? The most reliable pre-Islamic evidence – and indeed for Mecca the only evidence[6] – is that of Ptolemy, the celebrated astronomer and geographer who lived in Alexandria in the second century CE. Ptolemy produced a geographical outline, which included maps and tables giving the co-ordinates of all the known places in the world. He mentioned Yathrippa and Macoraba. Yathrippa is almost certainly Yathrib, but the identity of Macoraba is more perplexing, for he situated it at about the right distance from Yathrippa for it to be Mecca, but too far east and hence too far inland.[7] Nevertheless, in view of other distortions in Ptolemy's cartography, this was probably simply an error on his part. Moreover the name Macoraba may be derived from the South Arabian *mikrāb*, meaning 'temple', a name which would have been highly appropriate for a city which contained 'the inviolable place of worship'.[8]

2.4 *Qur'anic clues to the date of the revelations*

Determining the period in which the revelations occurred is scarcely less difficult than deciding on their provenance. That they are post-biblical is evident from the mention of Christians and Jews and the wealth of references to Mary and Jesus, as well as to Noah, Abraham, Moses and other individuals mentioned in the Jewish scriptures. But by how much do they post-date the rise of Christianity? Three passages contain possible clues, although none of them is decisive:

1. The story of the gardens of Sheba, in 34.15–17, is probably an allusion to the collapse of South Arabian civilization occasioned by the breakdown of the irrigation system between 451 and 542 CE.[9]

2. The 'men of the pit', mentioned in 85.3, are perhaps the henchmen of Dhū Nuwās, the Jewish King of Yemen, who martyred the Christians of Najrān in fire-filled trenches in 523 CE.[10]



Arabia according to Ptolemy

3. The 'owners of the elephant' referred to in 105.1–5 could be the troops of Abraha the Abyssinian Christian viceroy of Yemen, who probably made an abortive attack on Mecca some time between 540 and 547 CE.[11]

Since all three passages seem to refer to incidents which had become legendary, the likelihood is that they were revealed well after the events in question but at a time when they still seemed significant. Thus it is a reasonable inference that the Qur'an was revealed towards the end of the sixth century or in the first half of the seventh.

There is one further passage, which is sometimes cited as having a bearing on the date of the revelations:

> The Byzantines have been vanquished in the nearest part of the land and they, having been vanquished, will in turn vanquish in a few years. (30.2ff.)

This is the only reference in the whole of the Qur'an to contemporary international events, but its interpretation is unfortunately far from clear. Before examining some of the problems it raises, it may help if I give a brief outline of Byzantine history in the period in question. In the latter half of the sixth century, the Byzantines controlled Egypt and Syro-Palestine, whereas Mesopotamia was in the hands of their rivals the Persians. The relatively stable frontier between the two empires ran roughly diagonally North-East to South-West through Lake Van. Then in CE 602, profiting from a mutiny in the Byzantine army during the confusion following the death of the Emperor Justinian, the Persians invaded the Byzantine territories. In 613 they took Damascus, in 614 Jerusalem, and in 616 Persian troops occupied Egypt and Asia Minor. The Persian successes did not last, however, for in a series of brilliant campaigns Heraclius won back the territories lost by the Byzantines, and in 628 peace was concluded on the basis of the frontiers which had existed twenty-six years earlier. Shortly after this, the Byzantines met with fierce opposition from another quarter, for in 636 it was the turn of the Muslim forces to take Damascus and in 638 they captured Jerusalem. It seems highly probable that Qur'an 30.3f. refers to some incident which occurred during this turbulent period. It is not possible to be more specific for two reasons:

(*a*) There is a rare variant reading which, if adopted, would give a radically different meaning: instead of referring to a recent Byzantine defeat and prophesying a future Byzantine victory, these āyahs may originally have referred to a recent Byzantine victory and prophesied their future defeat.[12]

(*b*) The enemies of the Byzantines are not specified. There are at least two possible candidates:

(i) If we follow the standard text, it is plausible to think of them as the Persians and to suppose that the reference is to one of the many battles between these two great powers which took place between CE 602 and 628.

(ii) If we adopt the variant reading, they might be the Muslims. In that case the passage might have been revealed after CE 628, and have referred originally to a temporary setback experienced by the Muslims at the hand of the Byzantines, shortly before they launched on a course of rapid expansion into the latter's territories.

2.5 *Early biographies of Muhammad*

Is the information summarized in the previous two sections all we can deduce about the provenance and date of the revelations, or is it possible to supplement it by correlating some of the more allusive material in the Qur'an with reliable information quarried from the earliest biographies? My initial discussion of the miracles attributed to the Prophet may have led the reader to expect a negative answer to this question. Nevertheless, I remain relatively optimistic. My case rests on the recognition that the early biography which is most widely accepted by Muslims today – the Sirah of Ibn Isḥāq as revised and edited by Ibn Hishām – represents the confluence of two principal types of tradition, and that it is often possible to distinguish between them. On the one hand, there are traditions about the Prophet's campaigns which are likely to have a historical core. On the other, there are more popular traditions whose historical value is much more questionable.

Because the Arabs were accustomed to transmitting oral traditions of tribal battles and heroic deeds, they would have found it natural to preserve similar traditions about Muhammad and his entourage. Hence, perhaps even during his lifetime, traditions about his *maghāzī* or 'raiding campaigns' began to take definite shape. It is uncertain when these oral traditions were first collected and written down. A Madīnan scholar, 'Urwah b. az-Zubayr (d. 712), is credited with having compiled a *maghāzī* work which was transmitted by his pupil, Abū Bakr az-Zuhrī (d. 742), who in turn transmitted it to Mūsā b. 'Uqbah (d. 758). The latter probably made it the basis for his own compilation, of which an extensive fragment has survived.[13] From this fragment, which consists of nineteen traditions, and from numerous citations in the writings of subsequent

historians, the tenor of Ibn 'Uqbah's work is clear. Although not without political and theological bias, he sought to transmit faithfully the relatively sober traditions about the Prophet's campaigns and other key events in his life which were known to religious scholars in al-Madīnah. A somewhat later work in a similar vein is the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* ('Book of Raiding Campaigns') by al-Wāqidī (d. 823) which has survived intact.

In addition to this type of biographical literature, there was another, more popular, form exemplified by the work of Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 728 or 732). Wahb, who was of Persian stock but came from the Yemen, was reputedly an expert on the beliefs and practices of the Jews and Christians. He drew on his knowledge to write a number of books, including a life of Muhammad and an account of the prophets who preceded him. The life, like the work of Ibn 'Uqbah mentioned above, is known only from a single extant fragment and from citations.[14] Although Wahb apparently called it *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, it was much more comprehensive than the title suggests. It seems to have been of little historical value, however, as it abounded with miraculous and folkloric elements, and much of the material which he used probably originated with popular storytellers.

The two types of biography exemplified at an early stage by the works of Mūsā b. 'Uqbah and Wahb b. Munabbih were combined by Muhammad Ibn Isḥāq (d. CE 768) who was born in al-Madīnah but died in Baghdad. Like the former, he was a pupil of the celebrated traditionist Abū Bakr az-Zuhrī, but in addition, like Wahb, whose work he used, he drew on a fund of legend and folk material. He composed a three-part life of Muhammad, comprising an account of the prophets who had preceded him since the creation of the world, an account of his mission until his entry in al-Madīnah, and an account of his campaigns. Much of the first part has perished, but the second and third parts have come down to us in a revised version produced by Ibn Hishām (d. 828 or 833), and usually referred to simply as the Sirah (from the Arabic word *sīrah*, meaning 'life'). It is relatively easy to distinguish Ibn Hishām's additions to Ibn Isḥāq's text, and the English translator has conveniently relegated them to the end of the book.[15] What is less clear is the extent to which Ibn Hishām re-ordered the material and modified it by omitting traditions to which he took exception. There is a manuscript, in Fez, in the form of notes taken by someone who heard Ibn Isḥāq lecture in Kūfa.[16] It includes a few anecdotes not found in the Sirah, and is much less orderly than the latter. It is known, however, that there were no less than fifteen recensions of Ibn Isḥāq's work, corresponding to the different stages of his career in

various parts of the Muslim world. Hence the principal differences between Ibn Hishām's edition and the Fez manuscript may simply stem from Ibn Hishām's reliance on a more orderly recension. The historian Abū Jafar aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 923) frequently quotes Ibn Isḥāq, and his quotations usually tally with Ibn Hishām. Nevertheless, some anecdotes which Ṭabarī attributes to Ibn Isḥāq – including the notorious 'Satanic verses' episode which will be discussed at the end of this chapter – are not found in the Sirah. Were they absent from the recension of Ibn Isḥāq used by Ibn Hishām, or did Ibn Hishām deliberately omit them? If they were absent, had they already been deliberately omitted by someone else, or are they later additions which Ṭabarī mistakenly attributed to Ibn Isḥāq? These questions cannot be answered with any certainty.[17]

2.6 *A plausible chronological framework for the revelations*

By making cautious use of the extant *sīrah-maghāzī* works discussed in the previous section, it is possible to make sense of the toponyms mentioned in the Qur'an and to construct a chronological framework in which to view the Qur'anic revelations. It would appear that Mecca (of which Becca is probably a dialectic variant) is to be identified with the city which still bears that name and which is situated less than 50 miles inland, to the east of the Red Sea, some 200 miles south of the Tropic of Cancer. It had long been an important pilgrimage centre because of the presence of an ancient shrine, the Ka'bah. The Qur'anic references to 'the house', 'the sacred house' and 'the inviolable place of worship' are all to this edifice and its precincts. The principal tribe inhabiting Mecca, the Quraysh, also controlled the caravan routes which ran north to Egypt and Syria, and south to the Yemen, and it is this to which the Qur'an alludes in Surah 106. Muhammad, who was orphaned at an early age, first proclaimed his monotheistic faith in Mecca, but he met with increasingly vehement opposition from the rich pagan merchants. Then in 622, to avoid further persecution, he and his followers emigrated to Yathrib, an oasis over 200 miles further north, where he already had many supporters. Despite initial opposition from the Jews who comprised a third of the population, he gradually consolidated his position, and Yathrib became the power base from which he gained hegemony over a large part of the Arabian Peninsula. During his lifetime, Yathrib therefore came to be known as al-Madīnah or 'the City', short for 'the City of the Prophet'. Muhammad's prophetic career may thus be divided into two main periods: the one Meccan, and the other Madīnan. There is a *prima facie* case for thinking

that those surahs which depict him as a divinely-sent messenger to the pagan Arabs, and in which he is the butt of their mockery, were revealed in Mecca. Similarly, there is an even stronger case for thinking that surahs which refer to Jewish recalcitrance or to military campaigns, or which legislate for the Islamic community, were revealed in al-Madīnah.

For the chronology of the Meccan period we are largely dependant on the Sirah of Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Hishām (d. 768 and 828 or 833), although there is some additional information in the *Kitāb aṭ-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* ('The Great Book on the Classes of Men') by al-Wāqidī's secretary Ibn Sa'd (d. 844), which includes a life of Muhammad, followed by briefer lives of the Companions and succeeding generations down to the compiler's own time. Within this period we may tentatively distinguish three phases:

• 610–614, an initial phase of secret preaching following Muhammad's call at the age of forty. During this phase the core converts included his wife Khadījah, his cousin 'Alī, his friend Abū Bakr, and a freed slave called Zayd.

• 614–617, a phase of public preaching in which, despite persecution, Muhammad was able to rely to some extent on protection from 'Alī's father, his uncle Abū Ṭālib, who was the leader of the Banū Hāshim clan. It was probably towards the end of this phase that Muhammad encouraged some of his followers to seek refuge in Abyssinia.

• 617–622, a phase of worsening opposition which began when Muhammad's staunch opponent Abū Jahl persuaded the other clans to put pressure on the Banū Hāshim by boycotting all trade and intermarriage with them. Later, both Khadījah and Abū Tālib died, and the leadership of the Banū Hāshim passed to Abū Lahab, who was much less willing to give Muhammad protection. Muhammad therefore began to consider emigration and received pledges of support from sympathizers in Yathrib. It was probably during this phase that he had his celebrated experience known as the 'Night Journey'.

The dates given above for the phases of the Meccan period are only approximations. Moreover, with the exception of the night journey, which we have seen is mentioned in 17.1, the Qur'an does not refer explicitly to any of the events which the Sirah attributes to this period. For the chronology of the Madīnan period, on the other hand, we are on much surer ground. In addition to the Sirah, we have the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of al-Wāqidī (d.823) and the remains of the earlier work by Mūsā b. 'Uqbah (d. 758). There is substantial agreement between these sources concerning the dates of the principal campaigns. Moreover, some

of these campaigns and other key events which they mention are alluded to in the Qur'an.

The emigration, or *hijrah*, took place in September 622. The Muslims left Mecca in twos and threes and headed for Yathrib, but Muhammad, learning of a plot to assassinate him, made a detour and hid for three days in a cave with Abū Bakr (cf. 9.40). Although the Qur'an does not give any details, it indicates that those who emigrated did so for religious motives and to escape oppression (16.41), and that Muhammad's own town had expelled him (47.13). In Yathrib his status was initially similar to that of a clan chief except that his 'clan' was not a kinship group but consisted of the Muslims who had come with him from Mecca. These Emigrants (*muhājirūn*), as they were called, were clearly distinguished from the Helpers (*anṣār*), the members of the indigenous population who sheltered them and rallied to their cause (8.74; 9.100, 117); but the events which took place between July 623 and March 624 went a long way towards moulding them into a single community. These events may be grouped under two headings: the growing rift between the Muslims and Jews, and the initiation of raiding campaigns against the Meccans, in which the Helpers fought side by side with the Emigrants. Let us consider each of these in turn.

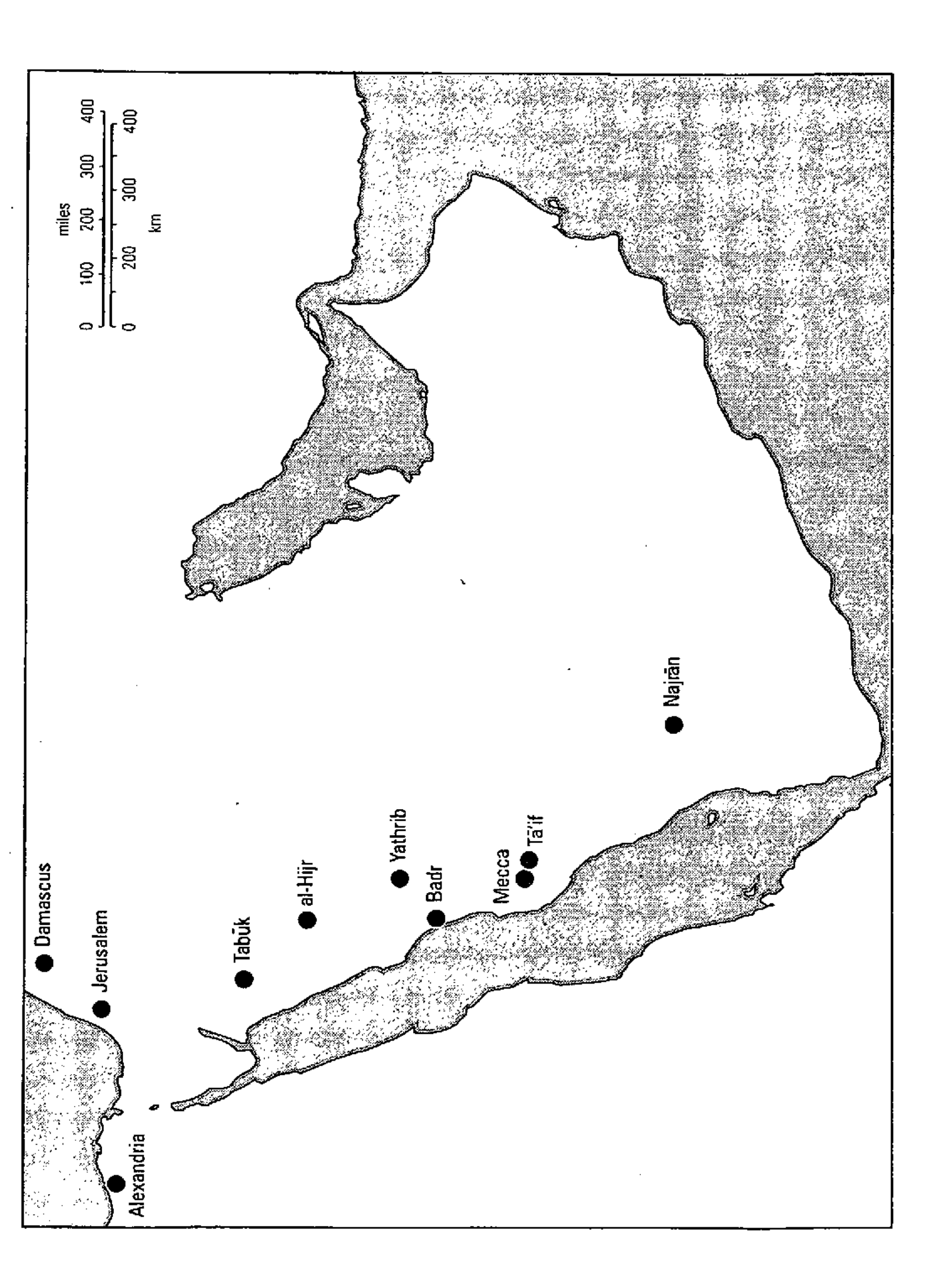
At first, the Muslims (or at any rate the Helpers), like the Jewish Christians, prayed towards Jerusalem and observed the fast on the Jewish Day of Atonement. However, when the Jews proved increasingly hostile towards them, the Prophet received revelations asserting that it was Abraham who had built the Ka'bah (2.124–127) and that Islam was the true religion of Abraham, who had been neither a Jew nor a Christian (2.128–141). Further revelations instructed the Muslims to pray facing in the direction of the Ka'bah (2.142–150) and – at a slightly later date – instituted the Muslim fast of Ramaḍān (2.185–7).

All this had the effect of giving the Islamic community a distinct religious identity, but it did nothing to alleviate the poverty of the Emigrants, who had left their homes and possessions because of persecution by the Meccan merchants. The only way in which they could hope to recuperate part of what they had lost was by raiding Meccan caravans. Of the early campaigns of this sort, the first to find an echo in the Qur'an took place in September 623 at Nakhlah, where a small band of Emigrants ambushed a caravan returning from the Yemen. Despite the success of the venture, some Muslims had misgivings because a guard had been killed in the skirmish and the incident had taken place during one of the sacred months when fighting was forbidden.[18] Muhammad was asked for

his judgment, and he received a revelation which made clear that although fighting during the sacred months was a grave offence, the offence committed by the Meccan pagans, who had prevented access to the inviolable place of worship and driven out the believers, was even greater. The believers who had emigrated and striven in the way of Allah could therefore hope for his mercy (2.217f.). This passage is highly instructive because it ascribes a religious motive to the fighting: striving in the way of Allah. It prepared the ground for thinking of armed confrontation with the Meccans as a religious duty incumbent on all Muslims – Helpers as well as Emigrants – with the ultimate aim of liberating the Ka'bah.

The minor triumph at Nakhlah was followed in March 624 by a spectacular victory at Badr on the coast road from Syria to Mecca. A combined force of 86 Emigrants and 238 Helpers, who had planned to ambush a caravan of over 1,000 camels, in which practically the whole population of Mecca had a share, found themselves facing an army of 950 men sent from Mecca to intercept them. Despite such unfavourable odds, the Muslims routed the enemy losing only 14 men – 6 Emigrants and 8 Helpers – while killing between 45 and 70 of the Meccans, including Abu Jahl, and taking as many prisoners. Although the name Badr does not occur in 8.1–17, 41–44, these āyahs were almost certainly revealed in the immediate aftermath of the battle, before the booty had been distributed. They attribute the success of the Muslims to the assistance of Allah and his angels (vv.12, 17), and describe the day of battle as the Day of Separation (*furqān*). In view of the location of the battle, the victory may be compared to God's drowning of Pharaoh's hosts after he had delivered the Israelites by 'separating' the Red Sea for them (cf. 2.50).

In some ways, the victory at Badr was even more of a watershed than the *hijrah*, for the Muslims emerged from it as a distinct community with their own salvation history. Nevertheless, it was only to be expected that the Meccans would before long attempt to avenge their dead. Muhammad made preparations by consolidating his position and exiling the Jewish tribe of the Qaynuqā', who had continually opposed him. Ten weeks after Badr, when the Meccans made a clandestine raid on Yathrib, the leader of the raiding party was given information by the chief of another Jewish tribe, the Banū an-Nāḍir. The raiders set fire to two houses and destroyed some fields before retreating. In March of the following year, however, the Meccans returned with an army of 3,000 men bent on annihilating the Muslim community. They failed to do this, but inflicted heavy casualties on the Muslims in a battle fought on Uḥud, a hill outside the city. This is almost certainly the subject of 3.120–175, where a severe blow



Arabia in the seventh century

experienced by the Muslims after the God-given victory at Badr (v.123) is explained as a test to distinguish believers from unbelievers, and a punishment for failure to obey orders.

In September 625, six months after the Battle of Uḥud, the Banū an-Naḍir came under suspicion of plotting to kill Muhammad. They were consequently expelled from Yathrib and took up residence in Khaybar. According to Islamic tradition, it is their expulsion which is referred to in 59.2–17. Bell, however, may be right in thinking that vv.2–4 originally referred to the earlier expulsion of Qaynuqā', and that they were subsequently revised and expanded.[19]

It was not until March–April 627 that the Meccans made one final attempt to crush Muhammad and the Muslim community. This time they were aided and abetted by the Jewish tribe of an-Nāḍir. The latter were so eager to regain their possessions that they offered half the date harvest of Khaybar to some bedouin tribes to persuade them to join a confederacy which was to launch an attack on Yathrib. The combined forces probably numbered at least 8,000 men. In the event the assailants were taken completely by surprise to discover that Muhammad had protected the northern edge of the oasis – the only part which was open to cavalry attack – by digging a ditch. After a two-week siege, during which the losses on both sides were minimal, the onset of wind and rain led the confederacy to break up in disarray. The atmosphere is graphically described in 33.9–25, which mentions an attack on Yathrib by 'the confederates'. During the siege, the remaining Jewish tribe of the Banū Qurayẓah, who lived in the south-east of the oasis, took an ostensibly neutral position but were in fact in league with the enemy and at one point intended to attack the Muslims from the rear. As soon as the siege was lifted, they were therefore punished. The details of what happened – how many men were executed and who was responsible – are hotly disputed.[20] The Qur'an, which does not mention the tribe by name, simply states that Allah brought them down from their strongholds, that some were slain and others imprisoned, and that the Muslims took possession of their lands and property (33.26f.).

The abortive siege of Yathrib – better known as 'the Battle of the Ditch' – tolled the death-knell to Meccan influence in Arabia. During the next twelve months, many tribes made their peace with Muhammad and paid tribute. Others were subjected to punitive expeditions. Then, in March 628, Muhammad was prompted by a vision to perform the *'umrah*, or lesser pilgrimage to Mecca. He set out with about 1,500 Muslims and reached al-Ḥudaybiyah on the outskirts of the city. The Meccans

threatened to fight if he proceeded any further. After negotiations in which the Muslims reaffirmed their allegiance to him under a tree, a treaty was established. It was agreed that both sides would cease hostilities for ten years, and that although the Muslims would not enter the city on this occasion, they would be allowed to return the following year to perform the pilgrimage. This is the plausible context of 48.18–27, which mentions Mecca, a vision, an oath taken under a tree, and the hindering of the offerings intended for the inviolable place of worship.

In March 629, Muhammad and 2,000 Muslims performed the lesser pilgrimage unhindered. He took the opportunity to make peace with what remained of his clan including its current leader, his uncle ʿAbbās, who probably converted to Islam on this occasion. Other eminent Meccans also converted in the ensuing months. Then an old tribal feud broke out between the Khuzāʿah, who had allied themselves with Muhammad at the time of the Treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyah, and the Bakr Ibn ʿAbd-Manāt, who were old allies of the Quraysh. The Khuzāʿah informed Muhammad that they had been victims of a surprise attack, and that the treaty had been broken by members of the Quraysh, who had supplied arms to their assailants. In January 630 Muhammad therefore marched on Mecca with an army of 10,000 men. He met with virtually no resistance. The leading Meccans surrendered, a general amnesty was proclaimed, and the Kaʿbah was cleansed of idols. Curiously none of this is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an.

Immediately after the surrender of Mecca, news came of an impending attack on it by the combined forces of two bedouin tribes, the Hawāzin and Thaqīf, who lived to the south-east. Muhammad at once marched out to meet them in the Valley of Ḥunayn. Many of the Muslims took fright at the size of the enemy host, but he and a small band of Helpers and Emigrants stood their ground and proved victorious. The incident is mentioned in 9.25f.

When Muhammad returned to Yathrib after the victory of Ḥunayn, his status rapidly changed, as tribe after tribe sent deputations to seek alliances with him, and the influence of Islam spread through much of Arabia. A few months later, however, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, who had recently won a series of spectacular victories against the Persians, restored the true cross to Jerusalem. There had been skirmishes between the Muslims and Byzantine troops the previous year, and the rumour now spread that Heraclius harboured thoughts of crushing Yathrib. In October 630, despite the intense heat, Muhammad therefore set out with an army of 30,000 men – by far the largest he had ever commanded – and

headed northwards. His aim was not to confront the Byzantine forces head on, but rather to make clear to the Arab tribes in the north the extent of the Muslim sphere of influence. He marched as far as Tabūk – which lies due east of the Gulf of Akaba, north of the twenty-eighth parallel – making treaties with those whose territories he passed through on the way, and requiring Christian and Jewish tribes to pay an annual *per capita* tax in return for protection from Allah and his Messenger. This expedition to Tabūk is probably the expedition 'to distant parts' mentioned in 9.42–8, 81–3. On his return, before entering Yathrib, Muhammad sent a small party of men to destroy a mosque which had been erected as a cover for those who were hatching plots against him. The incident is echoed in 9.107–110.

In March 632 Muhammad led the Hajj, the greater pilgrimage to Mecca. This pilgrimage, which was to be his last, gave the final pattern to the pilgrimage rites performed by Muslims. In the course of it, he preached a sermon at ʿArafāt in which he imparted a revelation which he had just received:

> This day the disbelievers despair of prevailing against your religion, so fear not them, but fear Me! This day have I perfected your religion for you, and completed My favour upon you and it has been My good pleasure to choose Islam for you as your religion (5.3).

It is generally held that there were no more revelations after this. Muhammad's health was already beginning to fail, and in June he died peacefully in al-Madīnah.

2.7 *Concluding discussion*

The earliest extant biographies of the Prophet were compiled at a time when Islam had become the ideology of a vast empire. Their historical value as a source of information about the earliest days of Islam is therefore questionable, as was borne out by our investigation of the miracles. Yet if we leave the Islamic tradition to one side, and approach the Qur'an without any presuppositions, the picture which emerges is extremely sketchy. We can deduce that the Prophet's name was Muhammad; that he was probably active early in the seventh century; that he had been driven out of his own town; that he was associated with Yathrib, where he had gone as an emigrant, and with Mecca, whose inhabitants prevented the believers from gaining access to 'the inviolable place of worship'. It seems probable that Yathrib and Mecca were known to Ptolemy in pre-Islamic

times as Yathrippa and Mācoraba, despite his ignorance of the precise location of the latter. Hence there is no good reason for denying that their sites are identical with those of al-Madīna and Mecca in contemporary Saudi Arabia.

If we wish to fill in this sketch and sharpen its focus, our only option is to draw on the early biographies. It was argued that, despite their relatively late date and their obvious ideological bias, these biographies were nonetheless likely to contain accurate information, particularly about Muhammad's raiding campaigns. A cautious attempt was therefore made to use them in order to make more sense of the toponyms mentioned in the Qur'an and to construct a chronological framework in which to view the Qur'anic revelations.

Readers who have taken the trouble to look up the Qur'anic passages mentioned in the previous section will be aware that some of them – such as those which refer to the battles of Badr, Uḥud and the siege of Yathrib – are relatively detailed, but that others are either too brief or vague for us to be absolutely certain that they do in fact refer to the incidents with which they are traditionally associated. Moreover it has proved much easier to find plausible correlations between the Qur'an and the Sirah for the Madīnan period than for the Meccan. Neither point should surprise us. We must bear in mind that the Qur'an does not set out to narrate the life of Muhammad or the early history of the Muslim community, and that the details which it furnishes about such matters are largely incidental. We also need to remember that the information which the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature gives about the Meccan period is less reliable than that which it gives about the Madīnan period. There are two reasons for this. First, there were comparatively few converts before the *hijrah*, whereas there were many thousands after it. Hence far more people would have remembered the events of the Madīnan period and passed on the information to their children and their pupils. Second, as mentioned earlier, although the Companions were probably not interested in biography as such, they may have made a conscious effort to preserve details of the Prophet's campaigns – all of which took place in the Madīnan period – just as the pre-Islamic Arabs had preserved oral traditions of tribal battles.

In attempting to construct a plausible chronological framework for the revelations, I inevitably had to be selective. Nevertheless, some readers may wonder why I did not include the Satanic verses episode in my account of the Meccan period. For those who are unfamiliar with the story, it is alleged that when the other clans boycotted the Banū Hāshim,

the Prophet was very anxious for the welfare of his people and longed for a revelation which would bring about a reconciliation between him and his opponents. Then God sent down Surah 53, and after the words,

> Have you considered al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā
> And Manāt, the third, the other? (53.19f.),

Satan caused Muhammad to add,

> These are the high-flying cranes
> Whose intercession is to be hoped for.

The Meccans were delighted at this apparent recognition of the three goddesses whom they worshipped and immediately joined Muhammad in prostration. Moreover, news of a rapprochement soon reached the exiles in Abyssinia and they returned to Mecca. But then Gabriel came to the Prophet and pointed out that he had been mistaken. The words were expunged from the surah and God consoled him with a further revelation:

> We never sent a messenger or a prophet before thee without Satan intervening in his desires. But Allah abrogates what Satan interposes. Then Allah confirms his āyahs. Allah is All-knowing, All-wise (22.52).

I have discussed this incident elsewhere[21] and will therefore be brief. Most non-Muslim scholars assume that this story is true, and that Ibn Hishām edited it out of Ibn Isḥāq's work because he found it embarrassing. It is possible, however, that like the story of Muhammad splitting the moon in two, it is merely an exegetical fable invented to explain an otherwise puzzling text. More will be said about this intriguing possibility in Chapter 4.

3

An Alternative Account of the Rise of Islam

3.1 Introduction

In the course of the last chapter, I drew on the extant *sīrah-maghāzī* works to produce an outline of the Prophet's career which could be correlated with the information found in the Qur'an. A radically different approach to early Islamic history has, however, been pioneered by Crone and Cook. In their book *Hagarism*, published in 1977, they conceded that it is 'not unreasonable' to present – as I have tried to do – 'a sensibly edited version of the tradition as historical fact'.[1] They argued, however, that scholars would be equally justified in taking a more sceptical line and assuming that the *sīrah–maghāzī* works could only be used for studying the religious ideas that were current in the eighth century (at the time when they were written) and not as sources of information about the life of Muhammad. Since, in their view, it is difficult to choose between these two options, they proposed 'to step outside the Islamic tradition altogether and start again'.[2] They produced a startlingly original account of the rise of Islam, by piecing together information drawn primarily from hitherto neglected non-Islamic sources. In this chapter, I shall attempt to summarize and criticize their work.

3.2 Stepping outside the Islamic tradition

Hagarism is written in a lively style. It is not, however, easy reading, because the authors make sweeping statements which are defended in extensive and extremely erudite notes that are relegated to the end of the book. We are concerned primarily with the first 26 pages of text. These alone are supported by 226 notes which fill a further 27 pages![3] I propose to present the substance of Crone and Cook's case in a manner which will make it easier to evaluate. This will entail carefully distinguishing their reconstruction of early Islamic history from the evidence on which it is ostensibly based, and summarizing the evidence *before* summarizing the reconstruction.

3.2.1 The evidence adduced by Crone and Cook

The most important pieces of evidence adduced by the authors may be summarized as follows:

1. An Armenian chronicle, attributed to Bishop Sebeos and allegedly written in the 660s, mentions a joint Arab-Jewish invasion of the Promised Land catalysed by the recent arrival of Jewish exiles in Arabia and instigated by an Arab preacher, Mamedh (Muhammed), who taught the Arabs that they were descended from Abraham via Ishmael.

2. Early Syriac Christian sources do not refer to the Arabs as Muslims. Instead, they use the word *mahgraye*, which is widespread from the early 640s onwards. Towards the end of the century, this term was understood to mean Hagarenes (descendants of Abraham via Ishmael, the son born to him by Hagar).

3. A Greek anti-Jewish tract, the *Doctrina Iacobi*, which was probably written in Palestine a few years after 634, mentions that the false prophet, who had recently arisen, proclaimed the advent of the Messiah. Moreover a mid-eighth-century Jewish apocalypse, *The Secrets of Rabbi Simon Ben Yohay*, gives a Messianic interpretation to the 'Ishmaelite' conquest of Palestine.

4. The second caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who conquered Jerusalem in 638, is known as al-Fārūq. The title is usually interpreted to mean 'He who distinguishes [truth from falsehood]', and to have been conferred on him by Muhammad. There is, however, a tradition that it was first used by the People of the Scripture, i.e. in this instance the Jews. If this is correct, it might be Aramaic rather than Arabic and mean 'The Redeemer'.

5. The *Doctrina Iacobi*, and several Syriac sources, imply that Muhammad was still alive when Palestine was conquered.

6. A Greek baptismal sermon by Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (634–8), and other contemporary sources, depict the invaders of Palestine as vandals who destroyed crosses and church property and were hostile to Christianity. A quarter of a century later, however, several Christian writers depict relations with the Arabs as amicable.

7. No reference is made to Mecca in any Christian source earlier than the *Continuatio Byzantia Arabica*, which dates from the second quarter of the eighth century.

8. Two Umayyad mosques in Iraq, one at Wāsiṭ and the other near Baghdad, are orientated too far north, by 33 degrees and 30 degrees respectively, for them to face Mecca. Moreover, the Syriac Christian

writer Jacob of Edessa, who studied in Alexandria in his youth, stated that in Egypt the *maghraye* faced east towards the Ka'bah when they prayed.

9. Genesis 25.18 implies that Ishmael died in or near Shur, 'which is opposite Egypt as thou goest towards Assyria'. In the Samaritan Pentateuch the word translated 'as thou goest' is *bākā*, which resembles the Qur'anic place name Becca (Arabic *bakkah*, 3.96). Moreover, a Samaritan chronicle, called the *Asāṭīr*, mentions the building of Mecca in connection with this verse. The Aramaic *Targum of Onkelos*, on the other hand, identifies Shur as Ḥagra, which is perhaps the same as the Arabic al-Ḥijr. The latter is a ruined site in north-western Arabia, which is mentioned in the Qur'an (15.80), but it is also the name of the enclosure in which Ishmael is buried in Mecca.

10. There is a pre-Islamic precedent for the notion of *islām*, in the sense of 'submission to God', in the Samaritan *Memar Marqah*. Moreover, there are some resemblances between the religion of Islam and the religion of the Samaritans, including the possession of a sacred city closely associated with an ancestral grave and a nearby holy mountain to which pilgrimage is made from the city.

11. The inscriptions inside the Dome of the Rock are the earliest independent evidence for the existence of the Qur'an and the Islamic use of the term 'Muslim'. It was built during the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik (685–705) and the inscriptions date from 691–2.

12. A letter which Pope Leo III is reputed to have written to the Ummayyad caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (717–720) alleges that Ḥajjāj (whom 'Abd al-Malik appointed governor of Kūfa in 695) 'collected all your old writings, composed others according to his own taste, and disseminated them everywhere among your nation ...'

3.2.2 Their reconstruction of early Islamic history

On the basis of the above evidence, Crone and Cook suggest that Islam developed out of a Messianic sect of Hagarenes, which grew up in Arabia after the arrival of Jews who had been driven out of Palestine by the Persians. These Jews requested help from the Arabs, on the grounds that the Bible taught that they were kinsmen. At first they were unsuccessful because of the difference between Judaism and the pagan Arab cults. Then Muhammad, who was an Arab merchant-turned-preacher, united the Arabs in the service of the one true God, and taught them that as descendants of Abraham they were the rightful heirs of the Promised Land. The members of this new sect were known as *muhājirūn*, a name

which indicated their belief that they were descended from Abraham through Hagar as well as the importance which they ascribed to the *hijrah*. The latter was not a small-scale emigration from Mecca to Yathrib, but rather a major exodus from Arabia to Palestine in which the Jews joined forces with them. They achieved their aim of (re-)gaining the Promised Land, and Muhammad was still alive when 'Umar, the movement's Messianic figure, entered Jerusalem as conqueror in 638.

The invaders were warmly welcomed by Jews, but they were feared as barbarians by the Christians, because they set fire to churches, destroyed monasteries and profaned crucifixes. Nevertheless, once Jerusalem had been taken, the Messianic doctrine quickly became an embarrassment to the Arabs because of its links with Jewish political aspirations. Hence they abruptly broke with the Jews, asserted their distinct identity by emphasizing that theirs was the true religion of Abraham, and rid themselves of Jewish Messianism by embracing the non-political Messiah of the Christians. Despite their acceptance of Jesus' Messianic status, however, they retained their earlier hatred of the cross by adopting a Docetic denial of the crucifixion. Furthermore, they stressed that Jesus was the son of Mary, thereby eliminating the notion that he was of Davidic descent.[4] For similar reasons, they followed the Samaritans in rejecting the Hebrew prophets and ascribing authority solely to the Pentateuch, which makes no reference to the legitimacy of the Davidic monarchy or the sanctity of Jerusalem.[5]

The elimination of the original Messianic element of the sect's teaching made Muhammad's role and status unclear. To compensate for this, he was first aligned with various non-biblical messengers, whom God sent to warn the Gentiles of the coming judgment, then he was promoted to the position of 'the prophet like Moses', who is mentioned in Deuteronomy. His new status required him to be the recipient of a revealed book. The Qur'an was therefore hurriedly put together and disseminated as 'Muhammad's scripture', probably at the end of the seventh century, during the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik. Around this time, under the influence of the Samaritans, the now redundant notion of *hijrah* ('emigration') was replaced by that of *islām* ('submission'). Henceforth, the believers were no longer called *muhājirūn* but Muslims.

Although the Arab conquerors of Jerusalem quickly disowned Jewish Messianism, there remained the problem of the Jewish holy city itself. Here, too, Samaritanism furnished a solution. The Samaritans had rejected Jerusalem in favour of the old Israelite sanctuary of Shechem, which was associated with the grave of Joseph. The Arabs could not of

course dispose of Jerusalem quite so easily, but they could demote it in favour of another sanctuary which was more in keeping with their supposed ancestral roots. They therefore sought to discover the sanctuary associated with the grave of Ishmael. At first, they favoured one in north-western Arabia at Becca, whose precise site is no longer known. Later, they preferred al-Ḥijr in the same region. Finally, by the time of ʿAbd al-Malik, they located it at Mecca, much further south. The original Becca was by now forgotten and the name was assumed to be a variant of Mecca. The original al-Ḥijr was still known, but it was reclassified as an object of divine wrath,[6] while its name was appropriated for the enclosure in Mecca in which Ishmael is reputedly buried. Muhammad's links with Jerusalem were finally severed by adjusting the date of his death so that it occurred too early for him to have been involved in the conquest and by reinterpreting the *hijrah* as an emigration from Mecca to Yathrib.

3.3 *Critical appraisal*

Crone and Cook's radical reconstruction of early Islamic history may at first sight seem seductively attractive, for it appears to be based on relatively ancient sources – more ancient, that is, than the extant *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. I shall argue, however, that their rejection of this literature in favour of their own interpretation of those enigmatic documents is unjustified, and that it is analogous to rejecting the New Testament in favour of an account of the rise of Christianity based exclusively on an uncritical reading of non-Christian authors. I shall then suggest other possible interpretations of Crone and Cook's 'evidence'. Next, I shall endeavour to show that their account of the rise of Islam is implausible. Finally, I shall argue that it makes less sense of the Qur'anic data than an account based on the Islamic tradition.

Despite the comparatively early date of some of the non-Islamic sources used by Crone and Cook, there is no *prima facie* case for thinking that their authors were better informed about the origins of Islam than were the Muslim authors of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. On the contrary, as the former probably knew no Arabic, had no first-hand knowledge of Arabia and were not primarily interested in Islamic history, it would be surprising if the information which they furnished were accurate in every detail. Moreover, although the *sīrah-maghāzī* works undoubtedly do reflect the religious ideas of the period in which they were compiled, there is no good reason for rejecting them out of hand simply because their authors were Muslims.

It may help to put the issues into perspective if we consider the similar problems encountered in researching the life of Jesus and the origins of Christianity. The four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were written after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, a pivotal moment in the development of Christianity. They are not in Aramaic, the language of Jesus, and they are confessional Christian documents whose provenance and authorship are uncertain. Furthermore, they undeniably reflect the religious beliefs and practices of the communities for which they were written. Nevertheless, it is generally held that they contain *some* reliable information about Jesus and his followers which is based on earlier traditions, and few would reject them *in toto* in favour of the very fragmentary pieces of evidence furnished by early non-Christian sources.

Let us examine two examples of this fragmentary evidence. The Jewish historian Josephus, who earned the esteem of Vespasian and Titus and received Roman citizenship, briefly states that John the Baptist was 'a good man who commanded the Jews to practise virtue' and that he encouraged them to be baptized.[7] He does not mention that John was a fiery eschatological preacher or that he baptized Jesus. Should we accept Josephus' statement but reject the additional information found only in the Gospels, on the grounds that the Gospels are confessional Christian documents? Surely not. The early Christians had no reason to invent these details. Josephus, on the other hand, probably purposely omitted any reference to John's eschatological preaching because he wished to present him to his Gentile readers as more akin to the Stoic philosophers with whom they were familiar.[8] Likewise, he probably avoided mentioning Jesus' baptism because it linked John with someone whom he viewed as a criminal rejected by the leading members of his nation and executed by the Roman procurator.[9] My second example is from the Roman historian Suetonius. He states that the Emperor Claudius (41–54 CE) expelled the Jews from Rome because 'they constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus'.[10] Should we conclude from this that Jesus Christ was alive in Rome and stirring up trouble a decade after the Christian sources say he was executed in Palestine? It would surely be wiser to read Suetonius' cryptic statement in conjunction with the New Testament (as most scholars do) and to interpret it as a reference to strife between Jews and Jewish Christians, which arose after Jesus' death, when the Christians proclaimed that he was the Messiah.[11]

One looks in vain, in Crone and Cook's work, for a critical evaluation of their sources comparable to my observations about Josephus and Suetonius. It would take me too long to discuss the characteristics of all

the non-Islamic sources on which they draw. Nor do I have time to enter into debate about the reliability of the dates which they ascribe to these sources. Suffice it to note that some of them are apocalyptic writings, that others are clearly polemical, and that the authenticity of almost all of them could be called into question.[12] Even if their authenticity were established beyond reasonable doubt, however, it would be possible in most instances to suggest an alternative interpretation of the information furnished by them. Let us consider each of the twelve pieces of 'evidence' in turn:

1. One element in Sebeos' account is indubitably inaccurate, as Crone and Cook themselves point out. He states that the Jews who had recently arrived in Arabia were refugees from Edessa following Heraclius' reconquest of the city towards 628. This would give too late a date for the origins of Muhammad's movement, because as early as 643 we have evidence that the Arabs were using an era beginning in 622.[13] Crone and Cook overcome the difficulty by supposing that the Jews in question were in fact earlier refugees from Persian-occupied Palestine. If Sebeos was wrong on this key point, however, why should we give credence to the other details in his story?

2. It is not so surprising that early Christian sources do not refer to the Arabs as 'Muslims' when we reflect how long this term took to filter through into European languages. For centuries Arabs were known in the West as Saracens, a word which medieval writers mistakenly thought was derived from their false claim to be *a Sarra geniti* – descended from Sarah.[14] We may conjecture that the Syriac Christian authors favoured the name *mahgraye* for similar reasons, wrongly connecting it with Hagar, whom they knew from the Bible to be the mother of Abraham's illegitimate son, Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs. Behind this name Crone and Cook rightly detect the Arabic *muhājirūn* – 'emigrants' – but there are no grounds for concluding that this must therefore have been the only self-designation used by the early Muslims. According to the Islamic tradition, this name was not restricted to members of the small band who emigrated with Muhammad from Mecca. It was used of individuals and groups who joined him subsequently, including those of the bedouin who went to Yathrib to participate in his raiding campaigns. In one or two instances, whole clans or tribes were allowed to call themselves *muhājirūn* during his lifetime.[15] Moreover, with the rapid expansion of Islam in the first few decades after his death, it may have been appropriated by many who regarded their own displacement as a *hijrah*, much as it has been used in this century by Indian Muslims who emigrated to Pakistan after the partition of the sub-continent.

3. It is not surprising that some Jews gave a Messianic interpretation to the Arab conquest of Palestine. They had a precedent from the sixth century BCE in Deutero-Isaiah's enthusiastic acclamation of Cyrus the Persian as YHWH's anointed (Isa. 45.1), who was destined to set the Babylonian exiles free. In both cases, there was probably a marked difference between the Jewish perception of the events and the perception of those who perpetrated them.

4. It is quite plausible that 'Umar's honorific title was of Jewish origin and that it was subsequently given an incorrect Arabic etymology. There is no reason, however, to suppose that he or the Muslims understood or approved of its Messianic connotations, even less to imagine that Muhammad proclaimed him as the Messiah.

5. Crone and Cook seem particularly impressed by the evidence in 'the historical traditions of the Jacobites, Nestorians and Samaritans' that Muhammad died after the conquest of Palestine.[16] They do not, however, mention that some Syriac sources give the impression that he died even earlier than is generally supposed. These include Jacob of Edessa's charts compiled in 691/2, which imply that his reign began in 622 but lasted for only seven years, not ten.[17] The mistaken notion that he was alive at the conquest of Palestine, which seems to have gained currency in some circles, may have arisen because his name was so often on the lips of the conquerors, whose basic creed was that there is no deity but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Alternatively, it could have come about through a natural tendency of outsiders to telescope other people's history when narrating it. There is a interesting parallel to this in Hecataeus of Abdera's remarks about the history of the Jews. Hecataeus was a Greek writer who lived at the Ptolemaic court in Alexandria, c. BCE 300. The city had a large Jewish population, but this did not prevent him from erroneously stating that the Jews were driven out of Egypt after a plague and that *led by Moses they reached Jerusalem*.[18]

6. Those parts of the Qur'an which evince a positive attitude to Christians may have been revealed during the Meccan period, when some of Muhammad's followers were warmly received by the Monophysite Abyssinian Christians. The āyahs which are more hostile are probably Madīnan. They were most likely revealed at the time of the skirmishes with the Byzantines and Heraclius' restoration of the true cross.[19] This hostility would have continued after Muhammad's death as long as the Byzantines, who were Orthodox Christians, were perceived as posing a military threat. Once Islam was established, however, it would have been easier for the Muslim rulers to revert to the earlier more positive

attitude, particularly when dealing with Monophysite or Nestorian subjects.

7. The absence of references to Mecca in early Christian sources is hardly surprising. Why should Christians, writing for the most part in Syro-Palestine or Iraq, mention a city which was geographically far removed and which was not the political centre of Islam?

8. The evidence adduced by Crone and Cook seems to imply that towards the end of the seventh century Mecca was still not recognized as the site of the true sanctuary. If this were the case, it is difficult to see how the authorities could subsequently have succeeded in imposing it, and in standardizing the direction of prayer, without there being widespread protest. There is, however, no trace of any such protest in the literature. Moreover, if the two Iraqi mosques were accurately orientated towards the same non-Meccan sanctuary, that sanctuary must have been further south than the biblical Shur, but further north than al-Hijr; nor could Muslims in Alexandria have prayed towards it when facing due east. We are thus forced to posit at least three different sites for the sanctuary before it was eventually identified as the Ka'bah in Mecca. Would it not be simpler to suppose that the builders in Iraq intended to orientate the mosques towards Mecca but that they made an error? Errors of this kind are not uncommon in the building industry. In this century, a second prayer niche had to be installed in a purpose-built mosque in Switzerland when it was discovered that the first one was wrongly orientated. As for Jacob of Edessa, is it not likely that he had a lapse of memory which made him think that in his youth he had seen the Muslims in Egypt facing in the same direction as the Jews when praying?

9. There is little direct evidence that Muslims were sufficiently interested in the Bible to consult it, and none that they consulted Samaritan writings or the Targums. The *Asāṭīr* may be post-Islamic and reflect a learned Samaritan attempt to link Mecca with biblical history, at a time when Muslims already located Ishmael's tomb there. As the word *hijr* simply means inviolable, there may be no significance in its use both as a place name and the name of the Meccan enclosure containing Ishmael's tomb.

10. In a footnote, the authors mention pre-Islamic Syriac sources which refer to 'submission' or 'surrender' to Christ.[20] This surely weakens the case for assuming that the Muslims derived the notion of *islām* from the Samaritans. The other alleged similarities to Samaritanism may be fortuitous. Alternatively, if there was in fact a Samaritan influence on early Islam, it could have occurred during Muhammad's own lifetime.

11. Why should we expect early inscriptional evidence for the existence of the Qur'an? If equally stringent criteria were applied in dating the four Gospels, it would have to be conceded that they were written far later than is generally held.[21]

12. The letter ascribed to Pope Leo may simply be a convenient literary device used by a Christian polemicist living at a later date. Even if it is authentic, and the allegations which it contains have some substance, the activity of Hajjāj may have been limited to destroying sectarian writings, and early codices of the Qur'an which preserved the surahs in a different order. More will be said about the latter in Chapter 12.

We have seen that most of the evidence adduced by Crone and Cook from non-Islamic sources is far from clear-cut. We must now discuss whether their reconstruction of early Islamic history is plausible. To my mind, its principal weakness is that it presupposes a whole series of successful conspiracies in the space of seventy or so years. I doubt whether it would have been that easy to rewrite history in the lifetime of hundreds of people who had known Muhammad in person or whose parents had known him. Furthermore, one of the conspiracies allegedly involved the hasty compilation of the Qur'an from earlier writings and its dissemination as the scripture revealed to Muhammad. If, as I hope to show in a later chapter, the Qur'an has an overall structure and is not such a haphazard compilation as Crone and Cook imagine, its editing would have been no easy task. It is therefore more plausible to suppose that it gradually took shape during the Madīnan period of Muhammad's ministry.

Not only is Crone and Cook's reconstruction of early Islamic history implausible, it also makes less sense of the Qur'anic data than an account based on the Islamic tradition. First, let us consider some of the tensions in the Qur'anic material, which they attribute to successive attempts at redefining Muhammad's status after the conquest of Palestine. I have already suggested that the tensions in the material about Christianity are explicable in terms of the vicissitudes of Muhammad's relations with Christians in the Meccan and Madīnan periods,[22] a theme which I have explored in greater depth elsewhere.[23] The tensions in the Abrahamic and Mosaic material may similarly be explained with reference to Muhammad's break with the Jews of Madīnah. The stress on Islam as the true religion of Abraham which is found in some of the material would have been highly appropriate in the early Madīnan period at the time of

this decisive break. The emphasis on Muhammad's status as a prophet like Moses, the recipient of a revealed scripture, may have come slightly later, perhaps after the Battle of Badr. For if, after becoming a distinct community, the Muslims began to think of their emigration from Mecca as a veritable exodus and the victory at Badr as their vindication at the Red Sea, they would have had no difficulty in acknowledging that the ensuing revelations, which included legislation, were part of a new Torah.

In these three instances, the hypothesis that some of the material in the Qur'an post-dates the conquest of Palestine is unnecessary. There is, however, a fourth instance where it is actually more problematical than the traditional view. In some surahs the recipient of the revelations is depicted as warning his idolatrous people of an impending catastrophe, which is described in cataclysmic detail. Are we really to believe that this apocalyptic material dates from after the successful conquest of Palestine, when it was deemed necessary to eliminate the Messianic features of Muhammad's message and recast him as one of several warners sent to the Gentiles? Is it not altogether more likely that these dire warnings were central to the Meccan revelations, when the believers were a persecuted minority living in the midst of polytheists, but that they were less prominent in the Madīnan revelations?[24]

It is true that there is a comparative dearth of reliable information about the Meccan period in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature, and that few details about the *hijrah* are given in the Qur'an, but the supposition that there was no Meccan period before the *hijrah*, and that the *hijrah* was a full-scale invasion of Palestine launched from Yathrib (rather than a minor emigration from Mecca to Yathrib), raises more problems than it solves. The Qur'an clearly mentions the expulsion of Muhammad from his own town (47.13), his presence with the Emigrants in Yathrib (33.6), and the fact that they had emigrated because of oppression (16.41). It does not actually say in so many words that his own town was Mecca, and that that was where the Emigrants had come from, but a number of other things which it does say point in this direction. It seems to imply that the inviolable place of worship was in Mecca (48.24f.), and that 'the house' was associated with the inviolable place of worship (8.34f.). Furthermore, it clearly states that Abraham was ordered to purify 'the house' (2.125); that he summoned his people to abandon idolatry (29.16f.); that he had to move away from his father because he threatened to stone him (19.41–48); that the believers, who had been driven from their homes, should follow the example of Abraham and dissociate themselves from their unbelieving kinsfolk (60.1–8); and that their unbelieving kinsfolk had remained in

the vicinity of the inviolable place of worship, and were its guardians (9.19–23). All this would make perfect sense if the Madīnan period were preceded by a Meccan period, during which Muhammad unsuccessfully summoned his kinsfolk to worship the one true God and presented them with revelations such as Surah 106, which calls on the Quraysh to worship 'the Lord of this house' (106.3). Without a Meccan period, it would, on the contrary, be largely inexplicable.

I have argued that the Islamic tradition, that Muhammad first received revelations in Mecca and subsequently emigrated to Yathrib, makes better sense of the Qur'anic data than Crone and Cook's elaborate hypothesis. Nevertheless, in view of the difficulties involved in identifying Mecca with Ptolemy's Macoraba – difficulties, which I suggested in the last chapter, are not insuperable – we must consider two ayāhs which they cite as evidence that the 'Hagarene sanctuary' was originally in north-western Arabia, much further north than the city which is now known as Mecca. In 46.27, God speaks of his having destroyed cities '*around* you' (Crone and Cook's emphasis). They take this to be a reference to the destruction of the peoples of Midian, Thamūd and 'Ād, all of whom lived in the north-west, far from Mecca.[25] Two comments are in order. First, they fail to note that the Qur'an also mentions South Arabian peoples who were punished by God, including Tubba' (44.37) and Sabā' (34.15). Second, if the Quraysh travelled north and south with their merchandise it would surely be appropriate to speak of these peoples as having lived around them, even though they had not lived in the immediate vicinity of Mecca. The other key āyah is 30.1, which mentions the defeat of the Byzantines 'in the *nearest* (part) of the land' (Crone and Cook's emphasis again). They assume that this refers to a Byzantine defeat in Palestine and thus very near to the supposed north-west Arabian sanctuary. The twelfth-century grammarian and Qur'anic commentator, az-Zamakhsharī, gives two plausible interpretations of this āyah, both of which are compatible with its having been addressed to the Meccans when they were far from the scene of the battle in which the Byzantines were defeated by the Persians. In az-Zamakhsharī's view, 'the land' may be 'the land of the Arabs', in which case what is meant is that the Byzantines have been vanquished in the part of the land of the Arabs nearest to them, namely the border of Syro-Palestine. Alternatively, 'the land' is 'their land', and what is meant is that the Byzantines have been vanquished in the part of their own land which is nearest to their enemies, namely Mesopotamia.[26]

3.4 Conclusion

To their great credit, Crone and Cook have drawn attention to neglected non-Islamic sources which may have a bearing on the early history of Islam. Their wholesale rejection of the *sirah-maghazī* literature in favour of drawing exclusively on these sources is, however, indefensible. They have not paid sufficient attention to the problems involved in dating and interpreting the writings in question, and the 'evidence' which they quarry from them is far from clear-cut. It constitutes too shaky a foundation to bear the weight of the edifice which they erect upon it. They also rely too heavily on arguments from silence. Finally, in the last analysis, they do not do justice to the Qur'anic data, which requires an initial conflict with Arab paganism in Mecca, followed by a *hijrah* to Yathrib, rather than a *hijrah* from Yathrib to Palestine.

4

Traditional Resources for Determining the Chronological Order of the Surahs

4.1 Introduction

I have argued that Crone and Cook's radical scepticism is unwarranted, and that the historian may still legitimately make critical use of the *sirah-maghāzī* literature to produce a chronological outline of the Prophet's career. Nevertheless, the reader will recall from Chapter 2 that very few surahs contain clear allusions to events which took place in the public domain, and which can hence be dated with reasonable certainty. The hard evidence may be summarized as follows:

Date	*Surah*	*Event*
623	2.124–187	Break with Jews
		Muslims a distinct community
	2.217f.	Raiding campaign at Nakhlah
624	8.1–17, 41–44	Battle of Badr
625	3.120–175	Battle of Uḥud
	59.2–17	Expulsion of Banū an-Naḍīr
627	33.9–25	Yathrib besieged
	33.26f.	Expulsion of Banū Qurayẓah
628	48.18–27	Treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyah
629	9.25f.	Battle of Ḥunayn
	9.42–48, 81–83	Expedition to Tabūk
	9.107–110	Mosque of Dissension destroyed.

If, as seems likely, the revelations occurred in the immediate aftermath of the events which they mention, we may deduce that these seven Madīnan surahs were revealed in the order:

2...8...3...59...33...48...9.

Is it possible to flesh out this meagre skeletal outline, and determine the probable chronological order of all 114 surahs? Islamic tradition furnishes three principal types of material which are avowedly relevant to this task: reports about the occasions of the revelation, literature about abrogating

and abrogated āyahs, and lists of Meccan and Madīnan surahs. In this chapter, I propose to discuss each of these in turn before examining the 'standard Egyptian chronology' which is based on them. Then, in the next chapter, I shall discuss some attempts by non-Muslims to determine the chronological order of the revelations.

4.2 Reports about the occasions of the revelation

The early biographies of the Prophet, and the classical commentaries on the Qur'an, include numerous traditions which allegedly indicate the circumstances which occasioned revelation.[1] For instance, when discussing 4.43, the commentators usually tell the story of how one of the Companions – sometimes identified as 'Abd ar-Raḥmān b. 'Awf – served wine at a meal, and how it got the better of him and his guests. Then, when the time came for the evening prayer, the person chosen to act as imām tried to recite Surah 109 but became muddled and intoned

> 'Say "O unbelievers, I worship what you worship ..."'

instead of the correct version which runs

> 'Say "O unbelievers, I do *not* worship what you worship ..."' (109.1 my emphasis).

Hence, God revealed 4.43, which forbids the faithful to say the prayers while drunk.[2]

As well as being embedded in the *sirah-maghāzī* literature and the classical Qur'anic commentaries, most of these traditions, which are known technically as *asbāb an-nuzūl* ('the occasions of the revelation'), may also be found in either or both of the two standard works on the subject compiled by Wāḥidī[3] (d. 1075) and Suyūṭī[4] (d. 1505). Whereas Wāḥidī gives traditions concerning 83 of the 114 surahs, Suyūṭī gives traditions concerning all 114, with the exception of the *fātiḥah*. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the bulk of the traditions in both collections refer to the occasions on which single āyahs, or short sequences of āyahs, were revealed. Thus, this material in its entirety covers only a fraction of the whole Qur'an. Consider for example Surah 55, which comprises 78 āyahs. Wāḥidī passes it over in silence, and Suyūṭī simply gives traditions concerning the statement

> 'And for him who fears standing before his Lord ...' (55.46).

He records that this āyah was revealed concerning Abū Bakr, because one

day – at the mention of the resurrection, the scales set for judgment, and paradise and hell – he said that he wished either that he were vegetation, so that an animal might eat him, or that he had not been created.[5] As Abū Bakr was an early convert, who outlived the Prophet to become the first caliph, the āyah in question could have been revealed at almost any time during Muhammad's ministry in Mecca or al-Madīnah. Moreover, even if the precise time and place of the alleged incident were known, it would be of little help in dating the rest of the surah.

In the case of the longer surahs, which are universally accepted as Madīnan, the situation is slightly better. Take, for instance, the first hundred āyahs of Surah 2. Wāḥidī gives traditions concerning vv.6–7, 14, 19, 21, 26, 44, 45, 62, 75, 79, 89, 97, 98, 99 – approximately fifteen per cent; Suyūtī gives traditions concerning vv.14, 19, 26, 44, 62, 76, 79, 89, 94, 97, 99–100 – approximately twelve per cent. Unfortunately, however, in a number of instances there are conflicting accounts of what occasioned the revelation. Who, for example, were the unbelievers mentioned in 2.6–7? Wāḥidī simply states that:

> Aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk said, 'It was revealed concerning Abū Jahl and five of his household,' but al-Kalbī said, 'It means the Jews.'[6]

Abū Jahl – literally 'Father of Ignorance' – was a nickname coined by the Muslims for a polytheist who was a leading member of the Meccan aristocracy and an inveterate enemy of the Prophet. Since he was killed at Badr, the tradition associating these āyahs with him implies that they were revealed before March 624. If, on the other hand, the āyahs were occasioned by the obstinacy of the Jews, they could have been revealed at a later date.

Islamic scholars differ over the status which they ascribe to the *asbāb an-nuzūl*. Most traditionalists regard them as indispensable for exegesis. When faced with two or more conflicting accounts of what occasioned the revelation of a particular āyah, they therefore attempt to assess which of them is the best attested. In the example just given it so happens that the attestation is extremely weak in both cases. Neither aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 732) nor al-Kalbī (d. 763) was a Companion of the Prophet; there is no indication of the sources from which they derived their information; and Wāḥidī fails to give an *isnād* (chain of guarantors) which would explain how the information reached him. Hence, even the most conservative scholar would be justified in ignoring both traditions as unsound. This seems to have been the attitude of Ṣuyūṭī, for he does not bother to mention them. If, however, one of the traditions could have been reliably

traced back to a known Companion, he would doubtless have given it preference over the other. For the convinced traditionalist, problems only arise in this domain when there are two or more rival *asbāb an-nuzūl* which are strongly attested. This is the case with Surah 112: one Companion, Ubayy b. Ka'b, is widely reported as saying that it was revealed in response to a question posed by the Meccan polytheists, whereas another Companion, Ibn 'Abbās, is widely reported as saying that it was revealed in response to a question posed by the Jews of al-Madīnah. After reviewing the evidence, Suyūṭī concludes that the two traditions cancel each other out.[7] The alternative, still voiced in some circles, is the somewhat dubious suggestion that the same revelation must have been given on two distinct occasions.[8] Other traditionalists take a slightly more sceptical view about this genre of material, arguing that the *asbāb an-nuzūl* indicate the types of situation in which the āyahs were revealed, but do not necessarily give accurate historical information about the precise circumstances.[9]

In recent times, two distinguished Qur'anic commentators, the one a Shi'ite and the other a Sunni, have advocated a more radical approach. M. H. Ṭabāṭabā'ī stresses that the *asbāb an-nuzūl* are often only weakly-attested and that even those that are well-attested sometimes contradict each other. He argues that many of these supposed 'occasions of the revelation' were not based on genuine knowledge of the historical circumstances but were the opinions of early commentators which they arrived at through personal reflection.[10] Amīn Ahsan Iṣlāḥi has demonstrated that whereas the various *asbāb an-nuzūl* often give the impression that a surah is a series of disconnected revelations, a painstaking examination of the surah itself usually shows that it is a unified whole with a coherent structure. He therefore considers that these traditions should only be taken into account when dealing with āyahs which refer explicitly to specific incidents.[11]

For our immediate purposes, it is not necessary to discuss these issues in greater depth. It is clear that the *asbāb an-nuzūl* should be treated with considerable caution, and that in any case they are of limited value for determining the chronological sequence of the surahs. Nevertheless, I suggest that where there is a widespread tradition associating a revelation with an incident which allegedly occurred at the time of a specific campaign, the evidence is admissible even when neither the campaign nor the incident is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'anic text. A good example is 24.11-14, which refers to an unfounded accusation of adultery levelled at an unnamed Muslim woman. According to Ibn Hishām, the incident

occurred immediately after the campaign against the Banū Muṣṭaliq, and the woman was none other than the Prophet's wife, Ayesha.[12] The story is told of how she had accompanied him on the campaign, but was inadvertantly left behind when the camp was struck. Apparently, when her litter was loaded on to the camel, she was busy looking for a necklace which she had dropped. Because she was so light, the drivers failed to realize that she was not in the litter and consequently departed without her. Providentially, a handsome young man called Safwān found her and brought her home safely. When the couple reached al-Madīnah later than the others, however, trouble-makers began to spread malicious rumours about them. As there is no good reason for doubting this story, we may infer that Surah 24 was revealed shortly after the campaign against the Banū Mustaliq. Unfortunately, although there is general agreement that this campaign took place in the month of Sha'bān, it is uncertain whether it was in the fifth year of the *hijrah*, and hence before the siege of al-Madīnah, or in the sixth year, and hence after it.[13]

4.3 Literature about abrogating and abrogated āyahs

From relatively early times, Muslims have sensed that the Qur'an contains contradictions. Take for instance the Qur'anic references to wine and intoxicants:

> From the fruits of the date palm and the vines you obtain an intoxicating drink (*sakr*) and good provision ... (16.67).

> They ask thee concerning wine (*khamr*) and games of chance. Say, 'In both are great sin and [some] uses for men. But the sin in them is greater than their usefulness' (2.219).

> Draw not near to prayer when you are intoxicated (*sukārā*) until you know what you are saying (4.43).

> O you who believe! Wine (*khamr*), games of chance, idols and divining arrows are an abomination and some of Satan's work. So avoid it so that you may prosper. Satan only desires to stir up envy and jealousy among you, by means of wine and games of chance, and to hinder you from remembering Allāh and from prayer. So will you stop? (5.90f.).

The first passage appears non-judgmental, the second is disapproving, the third forbids believers to perform the prayer while drunk, and the fourth calls for total abstention. There are similar problems with the

Qur'anic position concerning the status of Jews and Christians – 2.62 seems to imply that God will reward them for their faith, whereas 3.85 states that anyone who desires a religion other than Islam will never have it accepted, and will lose out in the hereafter. And what are we to make of the injunction in 9.5, to 'slay the polytheists wherever you find them', which appears to contradict the command in 2.190 not to initiate hostilities? Examples of apparent contradictions of this sort could be multiplied. Suffice it to note that if, in addition to the Qur'an, we take into account the Sunnah (the practice of the Prophet as recorded in the ḥadīths), the situation is even more confusing. What, for instance, is the correct punishment for sexual immorality? The Qur'an seems to give two different answers and the Sunnah furnishes a third. According to 4.15f., those who commit 'indecency' (*fāḥishah*) are to be confined to their homes until death, or 'until Allah appoints for them a way'; both partners to the offence are to be punished, but if they repent they are to be left alone. According to 24.2, men and women who are guilty of 'sexual immorality' (*zīnah*) are to receive one hundred lashes. According to the Sunnah, adulterers are to be stoned to death.

Faced with this apparent confusion, Islamic scholars argued that an earlier Qur'anic revelation had sometimes been abrogated by a subsequent one. As proof, they cited four passages from the Qur'an:

> When We replace (*baddalnā*) an āyah with another – and Allah knows best what He reveals – they say behold you are inventing! Most of them know not (16.101).

> We never sent a messenger or a prophet before you without Satan intervening in his desires. But Allah abrogates (*yansakhu*) what Satan interposes. Then Allah confirms his āyahs. Allah is All-knowing, All-wise (22.52).

> Whatever āyah We abrogate (*nansakhu*) or cause to be forgotten (*nunsihah*) We bring one better; or the like thereof (2.106).

> We shall cause thee to recite it, and thou wilt not forget it, except what Allah wills ... (87.6f).

In their view, abrogation (*naskh*) usually involved the suppression of a ruling without the suppression of the wording. That is to say, the earlier ruling is still to be found in the Qur'an, and is still to this day recited in worship, but it no longer has any legal force. This type of abrogation could account for most of the contradictions that I have mentioned. It is

widely held that the four passages which refer to wine or intoxicating drink were revealed in the order in which I listed them, each abrogating its predecessor, and that the only passage still in force is 5.90f., which requires total abstention.[14] Some likewise hold that the favourable view of Jews and Christians in 2.62 has been abrogated by the harsher judgment in 3.85,[15] and that the prohibition of aggression in 2.190 has been abrogated by 9.5, which commands the indiscriminate slaughter of polytheists.[16] Finally, it is generally agreed that the words 'until Allah appoints for them a way', in 4.15, indicate that confinement was a temporary measure to deal with sexual immorality, and that the revelation of further legislation was envisaged from the outset. This and the following āyah were abrogated by 24.2, which requires fornicators to be flogged, and by the Sunnah, which requires adulterers to be stoned as well.[17]

In addition to the suppression of a ruling without suppression of the wording, some jurists held that there are two further types of abrogation. First, there are allegedly instances where both the ruling and the wording have been suppressed. For instance, Anas b. Mālik is reputed to have said that, after two of the Prophet's envoys were treacherously killed at Bi'r Ma'ūna, the Muslims used to recite the words

> Inform our tribe, on our behalf, that we have met our Lord, who has been well satisfied with us and has satisfied our wants.

According to Anas, this revelation was originally part of the Qur'an but it was subsequently retracted. Hence, the faithful stopped reciting it, and it did not find its way into the written text.[18] Second, there are allegedly other instances where the wording has been suppressed but the ruling is still in force. The most famous of these is the so-called 'stoning verse':

> The mature man and the mature woman, when they commit sexual immorality stone them outright.

The second caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, is reputed to have said that this used to be recited, and to have taken it as the basis for the imposition of the death penalty for adultery.[19]

If abrogation were an established fact, the early literature about the most common type – the suppression of rulings without the suppression of their wording – would be of considerable importance for establishing the chronological order of the surahs. Unfortunately, however, the whole subject is highly controversial. It is arguable that the traditional understanding of abrogation is entirely alien to the Qur'an. As it is beyond the scope of the present work to enter into a detailed discussion of all the

issues involved, I shall simply give what I consider to be the principal objections to the classical theory.

In the first place, the first three proof texts could, with equal plausibility, be interpreted very differently. It seems highly unlikely that 16.101 refers to abrogation, in the sense understood by the jurists, because Surah 16 is generally held to be Meccan, whereas all the alleged instances of abrogation are thought to have occurred in the Madīnan period. Mawdūdī suggests that it refers to the fact that ideas are often explained in different ways in different places in the Qur'an:

> The same story is conveyed with one set of expressions and then later with another. At times a particular aspect of an issue is highlighted and at other times some other aspect of it is emphasized. To prove a point, sometimes recourse is made to one argument and sometimes to another. The same idea is presented briefly at one place and in greater detail at another.[20]

There is no need to suppose that the word *āyah* in 2.106 means a 'verse' of the Qur'an. The context of this passage is the controversy with the Jews and Christians of al-Madīnah. Thus, the passage probably refers to the Qur'anic abrogation of elements in the Jewish and Christian dispensations. In 22.52, the verb *nasakha* is used in the non-technical sense of 'to suppress'. If this āyah is read in context, and without any presuppositions about the 'Satanic verses', it would appear that Muhammad was under pressure to prove that he was a prophet by giving information about the final Hour (v.47). The Qur'an assures him that this is a diabolical temptation, to which previous prophets had been exposed: Satan tried to take advantage of their desire to please their hearers, but Allah always suppressed Satan's propositions and helped them to resist the temptation.[21]

A second reason for scepticism about the classical theory of abrogation is that there has never been a consensus among the jurists about which Qur'anic passages it affects. Az-Zuhrī (d. 742), an early authority on the subject, held that 42 āyahs had been abrogated. After his time, the number steadily increased until an upper limit was reached in the eleventh century, with Ibn Salāma claiming that there were 238 abrogated āyahs, and al-Fārisī claiming that there were 248. In subsequent generations, a reaction set in: the Egyptian polymath Ṣuyūṭī (d. 1505) claimed that there were only 20, and Shah Walī Allāh of Delhi (d. 1762) whittled the number down to 5.[22] One reason for the disagreement was uncertainty about the type of āyah which could be abrogated. From early times, many

scholars have maintained that abrogation is strictly limited to legislation; God sometimes modifies the laws which he imposes on the believers to fit the changing circumstances but he does not go back on his promises. On this view, 3.85 cannot possibly abrogate 2.62. Rather, 2.62 must refer either to Jews and Christians who embrace Islam, or to those Jews and Christians of old who were genuine monotheists.[23]

A third objection is that the doctrine of abrogation is unnecessary, because the apparent tensions in the Qur'an can be explained in other ways. For instance, if 9.5 is read in conjunction with the previous two āyahs, it is arguable that it relates to conflict already in progress with people who have broken their treaty obligations. Hence, it does not necessarily contradict 2.190. Similarly, it may plausibly be argued that there is no contradiction between 4.15f. and 24.2, because in reality they refer to different offences: the 'indecency' in 4.15 could be a homosexual act, as distinct from the 'sexual immorality' envisaged in 24.2, which is probably fornication or adultery.[24] In that case, of course, the words 'or until Allah appoints for them a way' in 4.15 cannot foreshadow the punishment later prescribed in 24.2; they must rather refer to the way *of repentance*, which is mentioned in 4.16.

The second and third types of abrogation are of less interest to us, because they are of no relevance for determining the chronological order of the surahs. Nevertheless, for the sake of completeness, I shall mention some objections to them as well. The clause 'except what Allah wills' in 87.7 may simply be intended to safeguard Allah's sovereign freedom; it need not necessarily imply that He did in fact cause Muhammad to forget any part of the Qur'an. The āyah which was allegedly revealed in connection with the Bi'r Ma'ūna episode, but which is not found in the Qur'an, does not affect any legislation. The report about it is therefore very weak evidence for holding that there are instances where both a Qur'anic ruling and wording have been suppressed. Reports of this kind probably came into existence to explain why oral material, which was cherished in some quarters as revelation, did not find its way into the standard edition of the text. We may note in passing that the story of the Satanic verses incident, which may well be an exegetical fable concocted to explain 22.52, would have appealed to those jurists who believed that abrogation sometimes involved the suppression of the wording, and that it may have originated with them.[25] Reports of alleged instances where the Qur'anic wording has been suppressed but the ruling is still in force are equally suspect. It is noteworthy that the only known cases concern rulings which allegedly abrogate other Qur'anic rulings whose wording

has not been suppressed. They were probably elaborated in circles where there were objections to the notion of the Sunnah abrogating the Qur'an. For example, the 'stoning verse' conveniently explains why the Prophet reputedly stoned adulterers when the Qur'an merely prescribed a punishment of a hundred lashes. It was not, as some jurists believed, that he had the authority to abrogate the Qur'anic penalty by imposing his own, but rather that he was acting on the basis of a second Qur'anic penalty which had abrogated the first.

In view of all this, the literature concerning abrogating and abrogated āyahs is of limited use for the purpose of determining the chronological sequence of the surahs. The most that may be conceded is that this literature does occasionally highlight a certain evolution in the tenor of the revelations. For instance, although Muhammad and his contemporaries may not have thought of 16.67, 2.219, 4.43 and 5.90f. as each being literally abrogated by its successor, these four passages seem to represent a progressive hardening of the attitude towards wine and intoxicants which strengthens the likelihood that they were in fact revealed in this order.

4.4 Traditional lists of Meccan and Madīnan surahs

A number of medieval writers record ostensibly ancient lists which give the Meccan and Madīnan surahs in what is allegedly their correct chronological order. The most widely-known of these lists is traced back via 'Aṭā' to Ibn 'Abbās, a celebrated Companion of the Prophet. Because of scribal errors which occurred in the course of transmission, several slightly different versions of this list have come down to us. Here is the version given in a fifteenth-century work by 'Abd al-Kāfī:[26]

Meccan

96, 68, 73, 74, 111, 81, 87, 92, 89, 93, 94, 103, 100, 108, 102, 107, 109, 105, 113, 114, 112, 53, 80, 97, 91, 85, 95, 106, 101, 75, 104, 77, 50, 90, 86, 54, 38, 7, 72, 36, 25, 35, 19, 20, 56, 26, 27, 28, 17, 10, 11, 12, 15, 6, 37, 31, 34, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 51, 88, 18, 16, 71, 14, 21, 23, 32, 52, 67, 69, 70, 78, 79, 82, 84, 30, 29, 83.

Madīnan

2, 8, 3, 33, 60, 4, 99, 57, 47, 13, 55, 76, 65, 98, 59, 110, 24, 22, 63, 58, 49, 66, 62, 64, 61, 48, 5, 9.

Abū Ṣāliḥ, another of Ibn 'Abbās's pupils, reputedly learned a different

list from him. One version of this list is preserved in the universal history written in the ninth century by al-Ya'qūbī:[27]

Meccan
96, 68, 93, 73, 74, 1, 111, 81, 87, 92, 89, 94, 55, 103, 108, 102, 107, 105, 53, 80, 97, 91, 85, 95, 106, 101, 75, 104, 77, 50, 90, 86, 54, 38, 7, 72, 36, 25, 35, 19, 20, 26, 27, 28, 17, 10, 11, 12, 15, 6, 37, 31, 40, 41, 42, 43, 34, 39, 44, 45, 46, 51, 88, 18, 16, 71, 14, 21, 23, 13, 52, 67, 69, 70, 78, 79, 82, 30, 29.

Madīnan
83, 2, 8, 3, 59, 33, 24, 60, 48, 4, 22, 57, 47, 76, 65, 98, 62, 32, 40, 63, 58, 49, 66, 64, 61, 5, 9, 110, 56, 100, 113, 114.

A second markedly different version of the Abū Ṣāliḥ-Ibn 'Abbās list, supported by the same *isnād*, is preserved in the anonymous *Kitāb al-Mabānī*:[28]

Meccan
96, 68, 93, 73, 74, 111, 81, 87, 92, 89, 94, 55, 103, 108, 102, 107, 105, 109, 112, 53, 80, 97, 22, 91, 85, 95, 106, 101, 75, 104, 77, 50, 90, 86, 54, 38, 7, 72, 36, 25, 35, 19, 20, 26, 27, 28, 17, 10, 11, 12, 15, 6, 37, 31, 34, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 51, 88, 18, 16, 71, 14, 21, 23, 32, 52, 67, 69, 70, 78, 79, 82, 84, 30, 29, 83.

Madīnan
13, 2, 8, 3, 33, 60, 4, 99, 57, 47, 76, 65, 98, 59, 110, 63, 24, 58, 49, 66, 62, 64, 61, 48, 5, 9, 56, 100, 113, 114.

Different again is the list of Meccan surahs traced back to Muhammad b. Nu'mān b. Bashīr via az-Zuhrī (d. 742), which is given in a work by the tenth-century bibliophile Ibn an-Nadīm:[29]

Meccan
96.1–5, 68, 73, 74, 111, 81, 87, 94, 103, 89, 93, 92, 100, 108, 102, 107, 109, 105, 112, 113, 114 (said by others to be Madīnan), 53, 80, 97, 91, 85, 95, 106, 101, 75, 104, 77, 50, 90, 55, 72, 36, 7, 25, 35, 19, 20, 56, 26, 27, 28, 17, 11, 12, 10, 15, 37, 31 (but the ending is Madīnan), 23, 34, 21, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46 (contains a Madīnan āyah), 51, 88, 18 (but the ending is Madīnan), 6 (but it contains a Madīnan āyah), 16 (but the ending is Madīnan), 71, 14, 32, 52, 67, 69, 70, 78, 79, 82, 84, 30, 29, 83, 54, 86.

These are the principal lists, but there are others including one which is traced back to 'Alī via Jābir b. Zayd and another which allegedly originated with 'Alī and Muhammad.[30]

It is clear from these lists that although there is no universally accepted tradition about the precise order in which the surahs were revealed, there is nevertheless a broad consensus about which surahs are Meccan and which Madīnan, and about the approximate chronological order. The principal points on which the lists differ are these:

1. Surah 1 is curiously absent from all extant versions of the 'Aṭā'-Ibn 'Abbās list. In the Abū Ṣāliḥ-Ibn 'Abbās list preserved by Ya'qūbī it occurs fifth, whereas according to the 'Alī-Muhammad list it was the first surah revealed.

2. Surah 13 is generally classed as Madīnan but in Ya'qūbī's version of the Abū Ṣāliḥ-Ibn 'Abbās list it is Meccan and seventieth.

3. Surah 7 is generally classed as Meccan and put in approximately thirty-eighth position, but in one version of the 'Aṭā'-Ibn 'Abbās list it is early Madīnan, occurring after Surahs 2 and 8.

4. Surah 53 is generally classed as Meccan and put in approximately twenty-third position, but in the 'Alī-Muhammad list it is one hundred and fourteenth and hence the last Madīnan revelation.

5. Surah 55 is sometimes classed as Madīnan and put in approximately ninety-sixth position, but in the az-Zuhrī-Ibn Bashīr list it is Meccan and thirty-fourth, and in the Abū Ṣāliḥ-Ibn 'Abbās lists it is thirteenth or twelfth.

6. There is general agreement that Surah 83 was revealed around the time of the *hijrah*, but opinion differs as to whether it was the penultimate Meccan surah, the last Meccan surah, or the first Madīnan surah.

7. Surahs 113 and 114 are generally classed as Meccan and put in approximately nineteenth and twentieth positions, but in both of the Abū Sālih-Ibn 'Abbās lists they are the final Madīnan surahs.

The origin and value of the traditional surah lists is uncertain. If they really dated from the time of the Companions, as most of the *isnāds* imply, one would not expect them to differ from one another to the extent that they do. It seems probable that they were compiled somewhat later by rival scholars and given spurious *isnāds* to enhance their prestige. The question is, how much later? We have seen that the *isnād* supporting the surah list in Ibn an-Nadīm goes back only as far as Muhammad b. Nu'mān b. Bashīr via az-Zuhrī (d. 742). It is unlikely that either of these scholars would have compiled such a list if in his day there were other lists in circulation which had the authority of no less a person than Ibn 'Abbās.

We are therefore on reasonably safe ground in concluding that none of the surah lists originated before the first quarter of the eighth century.[31] This would make them roughly contemporary with the early discussions about abrogation and with the development of the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. It is surely no mere coincidence that az-Zuhrī is said to have been active in all three fields. We may surmise that they were intimately related and that, once the doctrine of abrogation had gained widespread acceptance, the need was felt for an accurate knowledge of the course of the Prophet's career and of the order in which the surahs were revealed. In short, the surah lists may be based on the learned opinions of scholars rather than on carefully transmitted oral traditions reaching back to the time of the Companions.

4.5 The surah headings in the standard Egyptian edition

The first printed edition of the Qur'an produced by and for Muslims was published in Egypt in 1925. It is usually referred to as the standard Egyptian edition.[32] In this edition, each surah has a heading which indicates its name, the place where it was revealed, and the name of the surah which was revealed immediately before it. For instance, Surah 19 is headed:

> Surah of Mary – Meccan – except āyahs 58 and 71, which are Madīnan – it was revealed after 'the Creator'.

Now 'the Creator' is the title of Surah 35. That surah is in turn headed:

> Surah of the Creator – Meccan – it was revealed after 'the Criterion'.

By systematically working through all the headings it is possible to produce a table listing the Suras from (E1) through to (E114), where the E is an abbreviation for Egyptian, the number indicates the chronological order, and an asterisk after the number signals the presence of one or more Madīnan additions (in the case of Meccan surahs) or Meccan insertions (in the case of Madīnan surahs):

Meccan
(E1) 96, (E2) 68*, (E3) 73*, (E4) 74, (E5) 1, (E6) 111, (E7) 81, (E8) 87, (E9) 92, (E10) 89, (E11) 93, (E12) 94, (E13) 103, (E14) 100, (E15) 108, (E16) 102, (E17) 107, (E18) 109, (E19) 105, (E20) 113, (E21) 114, (E22) 112, (E23) 53*, (E24) 80, (E25) 97, (E26) 91, (E27) 85, (E28) 95, (E29) 106, (E30) 101, (E31) 75, (E32) 104, (E33) 77*, (E34) 50*, (E35) 90,

(E36) 86, (E37) 54*, (E38) 38, (E39) 7*, (E40) 72, (E41) 36*, (E42) 25*, (E43) 35, (E44) 19*, (E45) 20*, (E46) 56*, (E47) 26*, (E48) 27, (E49) 28*, (E50) 17*, (E51) 10*, (E52) 11*, (E53) 12*, (E54) 15, (E55) 6*, (E56) 37, (E57) 31*, (E58) 34*, (E59) 39*, (E60) 40*, (E61) 41, (E62) 42*, (E63) 43*, (E64) 44, (E65) 45*, (E66) 46*, (E67) 51, (E68) 88, (E69) 18*, (E70) 16*, (E71) 71, (E72) 14*, (E73) 21, (E74) 23, (E75) 32*, (E76) 52, (E77) 67, (E78) 69, (E79) 70, (E80) 78, (E81) 79, (E82) 82, (E83) 84, (E84) 30*, (E85) 29*, (E86) 83.

Madīnan
(E87) 2, (E88) 8*, (E89) 3, (E90) 33, (E91) 60, (E92) 4, (E93) 99, (E94) 57, (E95) 47*, (E96) 13, (E97) 55, (E98) 76, (E99) 65, (E100) 98, (E101) 59, (E102) 24, (E103) 22, (E104) 63, (E105) 58, (E106) 49, (E107) 66, (E108) 64, (E109) 61, (E110) 62, (E111) 48, (E112) 5, (E113) 9, (E114) 110.

Meccan insertions in Madīnan surahs
8.30–36; 47.13.

Madīnan additions to Meccan surahs
6.20,23,91,93,114,141,151–3; 7.163–170; 10.40,94–6; 11.12,17,114; 12.1–3,7; 14.28f.; 15.87; 16.126–8; 17.26,32f.,57,73–80; 18.28,83–101; 19.58,71; 20.130f.; 25.68–70; 26.197,224–7; 28.52–5, 85; 29.2–11; 30.17; 31.27–9; 32.16–20; 34.6; 36.45; 39.52–4; 40.56f.; 42.23–5,27; 43.54; 45.14; 46.10,15,35; 50.38; 53.32; 54.44–6; 56.81f.; 68.17–33, 48–50; 73.10f.,20; 77.48.

Some translations of the Qur'an include these headings without any explanation. It needs to be stressed, however, that they are not part of the Qur'an. Nor does what we might call the 'standard Egyptian chronology' correspond exactly to that of any one ancient surah list. The editors seem, rather, to have drawn eclectically on several traditional sources. The supposed chronological order of the surahs is relatively close to their order in 'Abd al-Kāfī's version of the 'Aṭā'-Ibn 'Abbās list, but differs from it in three respects. The first difference is that Surah 1, which, as we have seen, is absent from that list, is inserted in the fifth place as in Ya'qūbī's version of the Abū Ṣāliḥ-Ibn 'Abbās list. The second difference is that Surah 64[33] occupies the place of Surah 62[34] and vice versa. This is also the case in a list which Suyūṭī attributes to Jabīr b. Zayd and 'Alī.[35] The third difference is that Surah 110 is relegated to the one hundred and fourteenth position. It is not found there in any of the traditional surah lists, but according to a ḥadīth, which is included in the prestiguous

collection of Muslim, Ibn 'Abbās stated that it was the last surah to be revealed.[36]

For the details concerning Madīnan additions to Meccan surahs and Meccan insertions in Madīnan surahs, the editors of the standard Egyptian edition drew on the literature concerning abrogation and on the *asbāb an-nuzūl*. The reader will by now be aware that this material cannot simply be accepted at face value by the critical historian, but must be sifted carefully. Two examples will suffice. First, the belief that 73.20 is a Madīnan addition to a predominantly Meccan surah is based on the tradition that this āyah abrogates 73.1–4, by relaxing the length of the night vigil. It is questionable, however, whether this is really a case of abrogation, because the imperatives in v.20 are in the plural and are therefore addressed to the believers, whereas those in vv.1–4 are in the singular and are clearly addressed to Muhammad. There is thus no contradiction between the two passages.[37] On the other hand v.20 may nonetheless be a Madīnan addition all the same, for it is considerably longer and more prosaic than the other āyahs and does not rhyme with them. My second example concerns 47.13. Although there is general agreement that the bulk of Surah 47 is Madīnan, there is a tradition that this āyah was revealed earlier, at the time of the *hijrah*. The alleged circumstances were as follows:

> When the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him!) went out from Mecca to the cave, he reached it and turned back towards Mecca and said, 'Of all Allah's territories you are the most loved by Him and of all Allah's territories you are the most loved by me. If the polytheists had not driven me out, I would not have gone out from you.' Now the worst of enemies is he who commits an act of aggression against Allah Most High in His sanctuary, kills a person who is not fighting him, or kills during an invasion as the pagan Arabs did. So Allah Most High revealed to His Prophet: 'How many towns have We destroyed, which were much stronger than your town which drove you out? They had no supporter!'[38]

It is conceivable that this tradition is historically accurate, but since the āyah in question does not seem out of context in Surah 47, and since it has the same rare rhyme in *-ahum* as the other āyahs in that surah,[39] the tradition is probably a pious fiction.

4.6 Conclusion

The traditional resources which have a bearing on the chronological order of the surahs are all of limited value. The traditions concerning the *asbāb an-nuzūl* cover only a fraction of the Qur'an. Many of them lack *isnāds*, and in a number of instances there are two or more conflicting reports of what occasioned a specific revelation. Although some of these traditions may be based on genuine reminiscences, it seems likely that others reflect the opinions of early commentators. In any case, they rarely contain information which would enable us to date the revelations accurately. The literature concerning abrogation is of only slightly more use for our purpose; for there is disagreement about the number of āyahs which have been abrogated, with estimates ranging from as many as 248 to as few as 5. Moreover, the alleged Qur'anic basis for the doctrine of abrogation is highly questionable. The most that may be ceded is that this literature does sometimes serve to highlight an apparent development in the Qur'anic teaching on specific issues. At first sight, the traditional surah lists look much more promising. Although no two lists are exactly the same, they all have a family likeness, and some of the lists are supported by *isnāds* ostensibly tracing them back to the period of the Companions. It seems probable, however, that these lists were compiled during the first quarter of the eighth century, at the very earliest, and that they reflect the opinions of scholars who were active at that time. The broad agreement amongst these scholars about which surahs are Meccan and which Madīnan is understandable, as in the majority of cases this can be deduced from the content. On the other hand, the differences of opinion about the precise order in which the surahs were revealed probably reflect rival views concerning the *asbāb an-nuzūl* and abrogation. In short, there is insufficient evidence for holding that these lists are based on independent ancient traditions, although that possibility cannot of course be entirely ruled out.

Although Muslims often assume that the precise chronological order in which the surahs were revealed can be determined on the basis of the information contained in the surah headings of the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur'an, this is clearly not the case. These surah headings are not part of the Qur'an. They were compiled by its modern editors, who made eclectic use of the traditional surah lists, the *asbāb an-nuzūl*, the literature concerning abrogating and abrogated āyahs, and other traditional materials. The 'standard Egyptian chronology' ought not, therefore, to be regarded as sacrosanct.

5

Western Attempts at Dating the Revelations

5.1 Introduction

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, several European scholars have attempted to determine the chronological order of the revelations. As much of their research has been superseded, I do not intend to review it here.[1] Instead, I shall concentrate on the two approaches which have been the most influential. I shall first summarize the work of Nöldeke, who drew on Islamic traditions, together with his own criteria of stylistic and theological development, in order to assign each of the surahs to one of four successive periods. Then, so as to convey the complexity of the issues involved, and to make it clear that Nöldeke and his pupil Schwally have not solved all the problems, I shall discuss the date of one brief surah at length. Next, I shall outline the much more radical approach favoured by Richard Bell, who argued that the majority of the surahs are composite. This will be followed by an attempt to assess whether the standard Egyptian chronology, the Nöldeke-Schwally surah classification, or Bell's dating of the surah sections, furnishes the best working hypothesis.

5.2 The Nöldeke-Schwally classification of the surahs

Theodor Nöldeke made cautious use of Islamic traditions, but also paid careful attention to the style and content of the revelations. He assumed that the traditional distinction between Meccan and Madīnan surahs was basically sound, and observed that the former were usually much shorter than the latter and also generally had much shorter āyahs than them. He reasoned, however, that the migration from Mecca to Yathrib would hardly have caused an abrupt change in Muhammad's style, which must rather have evolved gradually over the years. Hence, building on the earlier work of Weil, he subdivided the Meccan surahs into three groups. Those which frequently contained oaths, and whose fiery and impassioned language most resembled the rhymed-prose oracles of the

pre-Islamic soothsayers, he classified as belonging to the first period; those whose style was closer to that of the calm and more prosaic Madīnan surahs he attributed to the third period; and the remainder he assigned to the intermediate, second period. The following list is based on the detailed discussion found in the revised edition of Nöldeke's work, which was prepared during his lifetime by his pupil Friedrich Schwally.[2] The numbers (N1) to (N114) indicate the order in which the surahs are discussed. Whereas in the first edition Nöldeke implied that this corresponded to the order in which they were revealed, in the second edition Schwally was more cautious and recognized that within each of the four periods the order was only approximate.

First Meccan

(N1) 96*, (N2) 74*, (N3) 111, (N4) 106, (N5) 108, (N6) 104, (N7) 107, (N8) 102, (N9) 105, (N10) 92, (N11) 90, (N12) 94, (N13) 93, (N14) 97, (N15) 86, (N16) 91, (N17) 80, (N18) 68*, (N19) 87, (N20) 95, (N21) 103*, (N22) 85*, (N23) 73*, (N24) 101, (N25) 99, (N26) 82, (N27) 81, (N28) 53*, (N29) 84*, (N30) 100, (N31) 79*, (N32) 77, (N33) 78, (N34) 88, (N35) 89, (N36) 75*, (N37) 83, (N38) 69, (N39) 51*, (N40) 52*, (N41) 56*, (N42) 70, (N43) 55*, (N44) 112, (N45) 109, (N46) 113, (N47) 114, (N48) 1.

Second Meccan

(N49) 54, (N50) 37, (N51) 71, (N52) 76, (N53) 44, (N54) 50, (N55) 20, (N56) 26, (N57) 15, (N58) 19, (N59) 38, (N60) 36, (N61) 43, (N62) 72, (N63) 67, (N64) 23, (N65) 21, (N66) 25, (N67) 17, (N68) 27, (N69) 18.

Third Meccan

(N70) 32, (N71) 41, (N72) 45, (N73) 16*, (N74) 30, (N75) 11, (N76) 14*, (N77) 12, (N78) 40, (N79) 28, (N80) 39, (N81) 29*, (N82) 31*, (N83) 42, (N84) 10, (N85) 34, (N86) 35, (N87) 7*, (N88) 46, (N89) 6*, (N90) 13.

Madīnan

(N91) 2*, (N92) 98, (N93) 64, (N94) 62, (N95) 8, (N96) 47, (N97) 3, (N98) 61, (N99) 57, (N100) 4, (N101) 65, (N102) 59, (N103) 33, (N104) 63, (N105) 24, (N106) 58, (N107) 22*, (N108) 48, (N109) 66, (N110) 60, (N111) 110, (N112) 49, (N113) 9 but vv.12–21 earlier, (N114) 5 but parts earlier.

Meccan additions to Meccan surahs

52.21, 29–49; 68.17–52; 78.37–41; 79.27–46; 96.9–19.

Meccan insertions in Madīnan surahs
2.163–71, ?200–2, ?204–7; 22.1–24, 43–55, 59–64, 66–74.

Madinan additions to Meccan surahs
6.91–94; 7.157f; 14.35–9; 16.41f., 110–125; 29.1–11, ?45, ?69; 31.11–18, 25–28; 73.20; 74.31.

Additions to Meccan surahs, date unspecified
51.24–60; 53.23, 26–32; 55.8–9, 33 (except last five words); 56.75–96; 75.16–19; 84.25; 103.3.

Of the 48 surahs of the first Meccan period, 23 have less than 20 āyahs, and a further 14 have less than 50. The āyahs are also short, generally having between 6 and 10 syllables. The surahs exhibit a rich variety of rhymes. Many of them open with clusters of imperious oaths, in which God swears by cosmic phenomena: set times of the day and night; sacred localities, and so on. Themes found in these surahs include the coming cataclysm (e.g. 70.8–14); the contrasting fate awaiting the blessed and the damned (e.g. 16.15–29); the bountiful nature of God's creation, which should evoke man's gratitude, awe and piety (e.g. 55.1–11); the condemnation of riches and the prescription of charity (e.g. 90); the rebuttal of the charge that Muhammad was jinn-possessed (e.g. 68.2), or a mere poet or soothsayer (e.g. 69.41f.); and the solemn authentication of his mission (e.g. 81.15–28).

The 21 surahs of the second period are generally longer than those of the first: the shortest has 28 āyahs and 13 have over 80. The āyahs themselves are also longer, having an average of between 12 and 20 syllables. The style is more monotonous: rhyme in *-ūn/-īn* is now common, oaths are rarer and less elaborate than before and usually simply mention the Qur'an or one of its synonyms. The fiery poetry of the previous period is replaced by diatribe (e.g 23.80–90) and by frequent references to God's 'signs' in nature (e.g. 16.3–18). Also characteristic is the frequent use of the divine name 'the Most-merciful' (*ar-Raḥmān*), the occurrence of the stock phrase 'those who believe and do good works', and the presence of prophetic discourse prefixed with the command 'Say' (*qul*). Most of the surahs have a formal opening: either a series of detached letters followed by a reference to the revealed scripture (44, 50, 20, 26, 15, 19, 38, 31, 43 and 27) or a liturgical bidding (67, 23, 21, 25 and 17). In a handful of cases, the surahs have a clear tripartite structure (54, 37, 26, 15 and 21). They open with a short exordium urging the mockers to repent before it is too late (e.g. 54.1–8). This is followed by one or more narratives about

peoples who abandoned God in their prosperity and to whom He then sent messengers whom they abused, with the result that they were severely punished (e.g. 54.9–39). Finally there is a menacing peroration addressed to the Meccans who reject Muhammad (e.g. 54.40–58).

The 21 surahs of the third period do not differ significantly in length from those of the second. Nor is there a noticeable change in the length of the āyahs. For the most part, the style and themes are the same, and many of the surahs have a tripartite structure. God is now called Allah, and the name 'the Most-merciful' is absent except from the *bismillah*. The revelation is sometimes referred to as 'the Message' (*al-balagh*), and the audience addressed as 'O Humankind', perhaps indicating an attempt to convert the bedouin tribesmen and people from Yathrib, who were present at the public recitations in Mecca. Finally, as these surahs were the last to be revealed before the *hijrah*, it is not surprising that many of them were revised at the beginning of the Madīnan period. Hence, Madīnan additions are not uncommon.

The number of āyahs in the 24 Madīnan surahs varies considerably: 2 have 200 or more and a further 3 have at least 120, but there are also 9 which have 18 or fewer. The āyahs themselves, on the other hand, are almost invariably long, and the rhyme in *-ūn/-īn* predominates. The content of these surahs need not detain us. Suffice it to note that the Prophet's auditors now include Jews and 'hypocrites',[3] that his domestic problems sometimes figure in the revelations, and that there is a concern to provide legislation and guidance for the Muslim community. Although Nöldeke stresses that some of the longer surahs may have been revealed over a considerable period, and hence cannot be arranged in a precise chronological sequence, he puts Surahs 2, 8, 3, 59, 33, 48, and 9 in the order which I put them in the last chapter on the basis of allusions to datable events mentioned in the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature. The other surahs are ascribed tentative positions relative to these seven, on the basis of internal evidence or the *asbāb an-nuzūl*. Consider, for instance, his reasons for putting Surahs 8, 47, 3, 61, 57 and 4 in that order. Surahs 8 and 3 are of course the fixed points, because they contain references to the victory at Badr and the setback at Uhud. As Surah 47 mentions the reluctance of some to engage in combat despite a recent victory (vv.20 and 35), he deduces that it was probably revealed shortly after Badr, but before Uhud. Consequently, he positions it after Surah 8 and before Surah 3. In the case of Surah 61, he accepts the tradition that it alludes to Uhud and to the failure of the believers to stand their ground on that occasion and fight in serried ranks as God required (v.4). Hence, he puts

it immediately after Surah 3. In the case of Surah 57, on the other hand, he rejects a tradition associating it with the Conquest of Mecca, because he detects allusions to both the victory of Badr (v.10) and the disaster of Uhud (v.22). He therefore puts it next. Finally, after this he puts Surah 4, because of the tradition that the legislation concerning orphans and widows (vv.1–14) was originally revealed to meet the needs of the dependants of the Muslims killed at Uhud.

5.3 The difficulties involved in dating individual surahs

It should be obvious from my summary of Nöldeke and Schwally's work that, plausible as their scheme may seem, it is based on very little hard-and-fast evidence. In fact, many of the surahs are extremely difficult to date accurately. In order to emphasize this point, I propose to examine at length the problems involved in dating Surah 110. The only reason for selecting this particular surah for discussion is that its brevity makes exhaustive analysis of the vocabulary relatively easy.

We saw in the previous chapter that Surah 110 apparently mentions victory or conquest and mass conversion to the religion of Allah, both of which seem to point to a Madīnan setting. Commentators usually associate the surah with the conquest of Mecca, which probably accounts for why it occurs relatively near the end of most of the traditional surah lists. It is curious, however, that despite the existence of a ḥadīth about it being the last surah to be revealed, it was never put in the one hundred and fourteenth position, although it has now acquired that position in the headings of the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur'an. We thus have an Islamic consensus that it is a late Madīnan surah, despite a difference of opinion over its precise chronological position. In deciding to assign it to the one hundred and eleventh place, Nöldeke did not, therefore, break with the consensus. We ought, nonetheless, to investigate whether the consensus is built on firm foundations.

Apart from the possibility that there were people who remembered when the surah was revealed, and that this information was reliably handed down to subsequent generations – a possibility which cannot be entirely ruled out – the consensus seems to be based on two pieces of evidence. First, Surah 110 resembles the beginning of Surah 48:

> Surely We have opened up a clear victory for thee that Allah may forgive thee thy former and thy latter sins (48.1f.).

We have seen that this surah, which also mentions 'a conquest nigh'

(*fatḥan qarīban*, 48.18, 27), was almost certainly revealed shortly after the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah, when the conquest of Mecca became a real prospect. Second, in post-Qur'anic works referring to the life and times of Muhammad, *al-fatḥ* – 'the conquest' – almost invariably means the conquest of Mecca. Nevertheless, the noun and its cognate verb both occur in Meccan surahs, where they have rather different connotations. In 26.118 (N56/E47), when Noah is rejected by his people, he implores God:

> *fa-'ftaḥ* between me and them and rescue me together with the believers who are with me.

Noah can hardly have required God to grant him a military conquest. The root meaning of the verb is 'to open', and what Noah presumably wanted was for God to judge openly between him and his people, or to open for him a way out of his difficulties with them. Surah 26 has a tripartite structure, and the story of Noah occurs in the central section. We are thus clearly intended to understand Noah's career as foreshadowing Muhammad's. It is therefore possible that Muhammad already expected a *fatḥ* during what Nöldeke describes as the second Meccan period. Moreover, in 32.28 (N70/E75), which on Nöldeke's reckoning is the first of the late Meccan Suras, Muhammad's opponents ask him

> When will this *fatḥ* occur if you are truthful?

Surah 110 might therefore have been revealed long before the *hijrah*, in which case it it would originally have been a charge addressed to the small band of persecuted believers who lived in expectation of a dramatic divine intervention followed by mass conversion.

So far, I have shown that Surah 110 could have been revealed at around the time of the Conquest of Mecca, as traditionally held, but that it could equally well be much earlier and belong to the second Meccan period. This does not exhaust the possibilities, as there are in fact two other plausible settings for the revelation. Shortly before the *hijrah*, Muhammad received pledges of support from sympathizers in Yathrib, the first of the *aNṢāR* or 'Helpers'. The surah begins with a reference to the coming of *NaṢR Allāh* – 'Allah's help'. It might, therefore, have been revealed at that time when expectations of divine intervention were heightened. The departure of the Emigrants was not, however, accompanied by anything akin to the flood which drowned the unbelievers in the time of Noah; the earthquake, which struck the people of Thamūd (e.g. 7.73–9); or any of the other punishments, which God had meted out to the disbelievers of old. Almost a year and a half passed before the pagan

Meccans received their come-uppance in the battle of Badr. There, like Pharaoh's troops who had pursued the children of Israel, they were vanquished at the Red Sea. The apocalyptic expectations of the Muslims were sublimated in this event. The account of the battle in Surah 8 mentions a reinforcement of a thousand angels and states that 'help (*an-NaṢR*) is solely from Allah' (8.9f.). It ends with the assertion

> If victory you are seeking (*in tastaFiTḤū*), the victory has already come to you (*fa-qad jā'a-kum al-FaTḤ*) (8.19).

Thus, Surah 110 might well refer to Badr and have been revealed when that victory was still fresh in the believers' memories.[4]

The evidence reviewed up to this point suggests that Surah 110 could have been revealed on any one of four separate occasions, depending on how the word *fatḥ* in v.1 is interpreted, and whether it is thought of as past or future. We must now extend our investigation to the vocabulary of the remaining āyahs. The expression 'Allah's religion' (*dīn Allāh*) occurs elsewhere only in two Madīnan surahs (3.83 and 24.2) but as *dīn*, in the sense of 'religion', is found in Meccan contexts (e.g. 10.22) little can be deduced from this. The only other reference to people coming 'in droves' (*afwājan*) is Meccan (78.18), but there the context is the resurrection. The command 'hymn thy Lord's praise' occurs another five times (15.98; 20.130; 50.39; 40.55; 52.48), invariably in Meccan surahs. One of these āyahs (40.55) also includes the only other instance of the singular command 'ask Him forgiveness', but in view of the reference to Allah's forgiveness of the Prophet's sins in 48.1 – which is indubitably Madīnan – this may not be significant. Finally, God is described as 'Oft-relenting' (*tawwāb*) a total of ten times in five Madīnan surahs (2.37, 54, 128, 160; 4.16, 64; 9, 104, 118; 24.10; 49.12), but this is the only instance where it is not combined with another of the divine names.

The cumulative evidence is hardly conclusive. Surah 110 may be late Madīnan, but a much earlier date – perhaps as early as Nöldeke's second Meccan period – is certainly possible. One further point merits consideration: the reader can hardly have failed to notice that Nöldeke followed tradition in regarding it as late Madīnan, despite the fact that on the basis of his own stylistic criteria he ought surely to have classified it as Meccan as it comprises only 3 āyahs of 11, 18 and 20 syllables respectively. In view of this, we must reckon with the possibility that it was in fact revealed in the second Meccan period, but that it was understood differently at different stages in the Prophet's career, and that its full significance was only appreciated towards the end of his life.

5.4 *Bell's attempt at dating the surahs and surah sections*

Richard Bell[5] took Noldeke's chronology as his starting point for his own researches, but modified it when he realized that the surahs were more complex than Nöldeke had allowed for. He agreed with him concerning the 24 surahs which he had classified as Madīnan, although, because of their composite nature, he thought it impossible to put them in chronological order. In particular he was convinced that the word *munāfiqūn* ('hypocrites') was first used with reference to those who distrusted Muhammad's policy at the time of the battle of Uhud, and that passages which contained it were either revealed or revised after that date. Concerning many of the remaining 90 surahs, his disagreement with Nöldeke was more radical. He considered that the criteria of style and phraseology were useful but indecisive because it was

> inherently probable that Muhammad varied his style according to the subject and the effect he aimed at producing.[6]

Despite their brevity, he thought Surahs 102, 105, 112 and 114 were Madīnan, and was inclined to the view that 107, 108 and 111 were as well. Concerning Surahs 1, 94, 101 and 109, which are also very brief, he seems to have been undecided. In his view, there were only nineteen surahs which were purely Meccan – 50, 53, 55, 69, 75, 79, 80, 82, 86, 88, 89, 91, 92, 93, 95, 96, 104, 106, 113 – and most of them included material from different dates. This leaves no less than sixty surahs which he thought contained both Meccan and Madīnan material. It would take too long to explain in detail how he reached this conclusion, but a key element in his reasoning was that Muhammad's progressive estrangement from the Jews of al-Madīnah, which is documented in Surah 2, transformed him from

> the man who thought he was preaching to the Arabs the religion which had been revealed to other peoples into the independent prophet of a renewed, parallel, and finally paramount religion.[7]

On the basis of this observation, Bell deduced that passages which mentioned 'Islam' or 'Muslims', or implied that Muhammad's followers were a distinct community, were Madīnan. He tentatively suggested that the composition of the Qur'an fell into three main periods:[8]

(*a*) An early period, from which only fragments survive. These consist mainly of lists of natural phenomena, which are signs of Allah's power and generosity (such as 23.12–14; 23.17–21; 78.6–16; 79.27–33; 80.24–32), and exhortations to worship him (such as 106).

(*b*) What he called the 'Qur'an' period. This began with the institution of the prayer ritual and covered the latter part of Muhammad's activity in Mecca and the first year or two of his residence in Yathrib. Bell thought that the word *qur'ān* was derived from the Syriac *qeryāna*, which denoted the reading or lesson in church services, and that the 'Qur'an' which Muhammad produced in this period was thus a collection of lessons to be used in worship. He reckoned that 96.1–5, in which Muhammad is commanded to read or recite, was not the first revelation but belonged rather to the early stages of this second period, as did 73 and 87, which mention the composition and recitation of the *qur'ān*. The 'Qur'an' was intended to give the gist of previous scriptures, but in the Arabic language. Hence the earlier message of Allah's bounty in creation was reinforced with the proclamation of the coming judgment, paradise and hell and with edifying biblical stories.

(*c*) The 'Book period', which began around the end of the second year of the *hijrah* – in other words after the break with the Jews and the victory at Badr – during which Muhammad was definitely producing a Book, that is to say an independent revelation which was immediately committed to writing. In this period the *qur'ān* is spoken of in a way which implies that it is complete (2.185 and 9.111), whereas 'the Book' (*al-kitāb*) is still in the process of being revealed (19.16, 41, 51, 54, 56).

We should further note that, in agreement with Grimme and Horowitz, Bell thought that the expression 'seven of the repetitions', which occurs in 15.87, was a reference to the seven oft-repeated stories about the punishment which God visited on the people of Noah, the people of Abraham, Sodom, Pharaoh, 'Ād, Thamūd and Midian. Since the same āyah, which in his view is late Meccan, distinguishes between these and 'the mighty *qur'ān*', Bell concludes that at this stage the punishment stories and 'the Qur'an' must have been separate from each other.

Bell did not attempt to solve all the problems of Qur'anic chronology. He saw this as a massive task, because in his view most of the revelations from the early period had been adapted during the Qur'ān period and embedded in surahs recited in the prayers. Then, after the second year of the *hijrah*, many of the surahs from the Qur'ān period were revised for incorporation in 'the Book'. He therefore set out 'to unravel the composition of the separate surahs'[9] in the hope that this would contribute to the solution of the larger problem. He held that they had been assembled (in many instances probably by Muhammad himself) from short pieces, which had originally been delivered separately. To his mind, this

explained why one often finds a wide variety of subjects treated in the same surah. This was not, however, the whole story. He thought that Muhammad made frequent emendations to his material. Hence the redactors, who edited the Qur'an after his death, had to cope with corrections, interlinear additions, additions on the margin, deletions and substitutions.[10]

Moreover, although Bell believed that all the revelations were written down during Muhammad's lifetime, he thought that they were written on loose sheets and scraps of various kinds, and that (because of the scarcity of writing materials) two unrelated revelations were sometimes recorded on either side of the same sheet, for the simple reason that it was the appropriate size. Little wonder, then, that despite their efforts the redactors sometimes made mistakes: by including passages which Muhammad had meant to discard, wrongly placing fragments written on scraps, and reading the two sides of a sheet continuously when this was not intended.

Three examples should help the reader to understand the way in which Bell set about his task. The first is his unearthing and restoration of a fragment from the early period, which is now embedded in Surah 23.[11] All 118 āyahs of this surah rhyme in *-īn/-ūn*. In their present state, vv.12–14 are no exception, for they end with the words *ṭīn*, 'clay'; *makīn*, 'sure', and *khāliqīn*, 'Creators'. By removing the words which I have bracketed in the translation, however, Bell produced five short lines rhyming in *-a*:

12. We have created man of an extract (of clay);
13. Then We made him a drop (in a receptacle sure);
14. Then We created the morsel bones,
    And We clothed the bones with flesh,
    Then We produced him another creature;
    (Blessed be Allah the best of Creators).

Here is the Arabic text in transliteration. The syllables *tin* and *tan* and the consonant *n* have been italicized to indicate that they would not be pronounced if they occurred at the ends of lines:

wa-la-qad khalaqna 'l-insāna min sulāla*tin* (*min ṭīn*)
thumma ja'alnā-hū nuṭfa*tan* (*fī qarārim makīn*)
thumma khalaqnā 'n-nutfata 'alaqata
fa-khalalqnā 'l-'alaqata muḍgha*tan*
fa-khalalqnā 'l-muḍghata 'iẓāma*n*
fa-khasawnā 'l-'iẓama laḥma*n*

thumma ansha'nā-hū khalqan ākhara
(*fa-tabārak allāhu aḥsanu 'l-khāliqīn*).

What adds plausibility to this example is Bell's observation that before *sulālah*, 'extract', was glossed with the phrase 'of clay' it probably meant 'semen', as in 32.8, which is the only other passage where it occurs. It therefore looks as if what was originally an account of how human beings are created in the womb has been combined with a reference to God's creation of the first man from clay, a story with which Muhammad was probably not familiar in the early period.

The second example is Bell's account of the composition of Surah 78. Nöldeke had held that it was an early Meccan revelation (N33), to which vv.37–40 were added during the second Meccan period.[12] Bell's analysis is more elaborate.[13] He breaks the surah into three sections:

1. The central section, vv.6–16, which describes signs of Allah's power in creation, is Meccan and is probably the earliest part.

2. The third section, vv.17–41, which deals with the Last Day, is also Meccan. As it continues the same rhyme in *-ā*, Bell considers it just possible that it was composed at the same time as vv.6–16, but thinks it more likely that the two sections were originally unrelated. In any case, this third section has been revised at a number of points:

(*a*) v.25 is introduced by *illā* ('except'); and therefore looks like a correction. It was probably inserted to make it agree with 38.57.

(*b*) vv.27–30 are almost certainly a later addition.

(*c*) vv.33–34 were probably inserted later.

(*d*) vv.37–38 certainly did not belong to the original surah, because v.36 corresponds to v.26 and would naturally close the section.

(*e*) vv.39–40 may be continuous with v.38, but the ideas and language seem earlier. They may have on the back of a scrap used to record vv.37–38, or alternatively they may have been the original ending before those āyahs were added.

3. The first section, vv.1–5, rhymes in *-ūn*. It was prefixed later, as an introduction, and is probably Madīnan.

The third example is Bell's treatment of Surah 79. Nöldeke had regarded vv.1–26 as an early Meccan surah (N31), to which vv.27–46 were added somewhat later.[14] Bell's analysis is much more complex.[15] He thought that, apart from vv.1–14 and 34–41, it was a pastiche of unrelated fragments. He admits from the outset that it is not easy to see how the various pieces of the surah came to stand as they do, and at various points in his discussion he uses the words 'seem', 'may be' and 'probability'.

Nevertheless, from the way in which he presents the surah in his translation, he appears to have envisaged four principal stages to the process:

1. Three unrelated early Meccan revelations were recorded as follows:

(*a*) vv.15–26, a revelation about Moses and Pharaoh, was written on one side of a sheet;

(*b*) vv.27–33, a revelation about God's power, was written on one side of a scrap;

(*c*) vv.42–46, a fragment of a revelation about the 'hour', was written on one side of another scrap.

2. Vv.1–14, a revelation about the resurrection and judgment (which was entirely unrelated to any of the afore-mentioned), was written on the back of the sheet which had already been used to record vv.15–26.

3. Vv.34–41, which deal with the fate of the evil and the good, were revealed considerably later as an expansion of vv.1–14. They were written on the back of the two scraps which had already been used to record vv.27–33 and 42–46.

4. The redactors, finding that the sheet and the two scraps had been preserved together, wrongly inferred that all the material written on them was related, and copied them out as a continuous whole.

5.5 The best working hypothesis?

It is evident that neither the editors of the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur'an, nor Nöldeke and Schwally, have given us a definitive account of the order in which the surahs were revealed. If we are to believe Bell, it will never be possible to rearrange them in a chronological sequence, because most of them were compiled from material which originated at different times or was subjected to one or more revisions. In view of the discrepancy between these three approaches to dating the revelations, readers who wish to trace the step-by-step development of various Qur'anic themes, from the time of Muhammad's call through to the end of his ministry, are faced with a dilemma: what chronological scheme should they adopt as a working hypothesis? With this question in mind I propose to look briefly at two problems: the identity of the female companions of the righteous in the hereafter, and the use of the divine names Allah and ar-Rahmān.

The reader may be curious to know why, on the one hand, the Qur'an declares that in the hereafter righteous believers will enter paradise with their spouses, while on the other, it promises them the companionship of wide-eyed full-bosomed maidens who have not yet been deflowered.

Twelve passages have a bearing on this subject: five of them mention the female companions – although only three of these emphasize their voluptuous nature – and seven mention spouses. If the twelve passages are read in the order suggested by the standard Egyptian chronology there is no obvious development. The first (E38), third (E46), fourth (E56), seventh (E80), and twelfth (E97) describe the female companions, whereas the remainder, which likewise span the Meccan and Madīnan periods, merely mention spouses. If, however, instead of the standard Egyptian chronology, we adopt the Nöldeke-Schwally classification, a clear pattern emerges. First, there are three passages, belonging to the latter half of the first Meccan period, which mention voluptuous virgins. The third of these includes a reference to the way in which they modestly restrain their glances. This element in the description predominates in the fourth and fifth passages, which are both from the first half of the second Meccan period. Then, between the middle of the second Meccan period and the end of the third, there are four passages which mention spouses entering Paradise. Finally, there are three Madīnan passages which promise the believers 'purified spouses'. The evidence may be set out as follows:

First Meccan
N33/E80
'full-breasted [damsels][16] of the same age' (78.33).
N41/E46
'wide-eyed houris[17]
like treasured pearls,
as a reward for what they used to do' (56.22ff.).
'We have created them by a [special] creation[18]
and made them virgins,
lovers[19] of the same age' (56.33ff.).
N43/E97
'[damsels] restraining their glances, whom neither men nor jinn will have touched before them
... like rubies and coral' (55.56,58).
'good and comely [damsels], houris cloistered[20] in pavilions ... whom neither men nor jinn will have touched before them' (55.71f., 74).

Second Meccan
N50/E56
'[damsels] restraining their glances, whose eyes are like hidden eggs' (37.48).

N59/E38
'[damsels] restraining their glances, of the same age' (38.52).
N60/E41
'they and their spouses' (36.56).
N61/E63
'You and your spouses' (43.70).

Third Meccan
N78/E60
'whoever of their fathers, their spouses and offspring have acted honourably' (40.8).
N90/E96
'whoever of their fathers, their spouses and offspring have acted honourably' (13.23).

Madīnan
N91/E87
'purified spouses' (2.25).
N97/E89
'purified spouses' (3.15).
N100/E92
'purified spouses' (4.57).

Bell agrees with Nöldeke and Schwally that Surah 55 is Meccan.[21] In other respects, however, his analyses of the surahs which contain these passages are less informative because they do not enable the reader to distinguish between the early and middle Meccan revelations. It is tempting, therefore, to conclude that in this instance the Nöldeke-Schwally classification is the most useful. A plausible explanation of the data when viewed from this perspective might be that the sensuous imagery of the the early Meccan surahs was intended to capture the attention of the Meccan pagans but, lest it be misunderstood by the faithful, it was phased out and replaced by references to the spouses of the believers.

Let us turn now to the second problem, the use of the divine names Allah and ar-Raḥmān. The name ar-Raḥmān ('the Most-merciful') appears at first sight to be widespread. This is because it occurs in the formula 'In the name of Allah the Most-merciful, the All-merciful', which is prefixed to all the surahs except Surah 9. If, however, we discount these 113 occurrences of the name, and five other instances where it is also combined with ar-Raḥīm ('the All-merciful'),[22] the picture is rather different. We are left with 51 occurrences in a mere 13 surahs. Now

let us examine their chronological distribution. If we use the standard Egyptian chronology, we will observe that all of them are Meccan with the exception of 55.1 (E97), which is Madīnan. If we employ the Nöldeke-Schwally scheme, the name appears to be exclusively Meccan, and almost entirely restricted to the second Meccan period:

First Meccan
N43/E97 Surah 55.1

Second Meccan addition to first Meccan surah
[N33]/E80 Surah 78.37f, two occurrences

Second Meccan
N54/E34 Surah 50.33
N55/E45 Surah 20.5, etc., four occurrences
N56/E47 Surah 26.5
N58/E44 Surah 19.18, etc, sixteen occurrences
N60/E41 Surah 36.11 etc., four occurrences
N61/E63 Surah 43.17 etc., eight occurrences
N63/E77 Surah 67.3 etc., four occurrences
N65/E73 Surah 21.26 etc., four occurrences
N66/E42 Surah 25.26 etc., four occurrences
N67/E50 Surah 17.110

Third Meccan
N90/E96 Surah 13.30.

It thus looks as if the name ar-Raḥmān was absent from the earliest revelations, was used frequently during a short period, but then ceased to occur except in combination with ar-Raḥīm.

The name Allah is found much more frequently than ar-Raḥmān. Indeed, at first sight it seems almost ubiquitous, for it occurs a total of 2692 times. There are, however, no less than 33 relatively short surahs from which it is entirely absent. If we follow the standard Egyptian chronology, 28 of these are early Meccan but 5 are considerably later: 69 (E78), 70 (E79), 78 (E80), 83 (E86) and 55 (E97). If, on the other hand, we opt for the Nöldeke-Schwally classification, it would appear that 32 of the surahs belong to the first Meccan period and that the remaining one – Surah 54 (N49) – is hardly an exception, because it is the very first surah of the second period. In other words, it looks as if the name Allah invariably occurred in surahs revealed after the onset of the second Meccan period, but that prior to that it only occurred occasionally. If we

now consult Bell, we discover that in his opinion, apart from 79.25 and 95.8, all the āyahs which mention Allah in surahs of Nöldeke's first Meccan period are later additions.[23] Thus, it appears that the names Allah and ar-Raḥmān were both absent from the earliest revelations, that they were both introduced around the beginning of the second Meccan period, and that ar-Raḥmān was subsequently dropped whereas Allah became increasingly frequent.

We may therefore conclude, provisionally, that in the case of the divine names the Nöldeke-Schwally scheme, corrected in the light of Bell's observations, yields the best results. The pattern which emerges may be plausibly explained as follows.[24] In the earliest revelations, God was simply referred to as Muhammad's Lord (Arabic *Rabb*). Then, some time after Muhammad began to preach publicly, the names ar-Raḥmān and Allah were introduced. Both names were, in some ways, problematical. We can deduce from the Qur'an that the Meccans already acknowledged Allah as the High God who had created the universe, and that they would even call on him exclusively in times of crisis, but that they usually also worshipped other lesser deities (29.61–5) including the three goddesses whom they regarded as his daughters (53.9). We can also deduce that, for them, belief in Allah was not accompanied by moral demands (10.22). It was therefore difficult to persuade them that Allah was the only God; that He alone should be worshipped; that he had sent messengers to instruct human beings on how to behave; and that on the day of judgment they would be rewarded or punished in accordance with their deeds.[25] The problem with the name ar-Raḥmān was of an entirely different kind. There is inscriptional evidence that there were monotheists in Palmyra and the Yemen who called on God as ar-Raḥmān,[26] but there is no evidence that the name was known in Mecca. Indeed, the Qur'an implies that when it occurred in revelations it did not strike any chords with the Meccan pagans:

> When they are told, 'Prostrate yourselves before the Most-merciful', they say 'What is the Most-merciful? Should we prostrate ourselves to what you order us to?' And it increases their disdain (25.60).

> … even though they disbelieve in the Most-merciful. Say, 'He is my Lord; there is no deity except Him, on Him do I rely and to Him I turn' (13.30).

They may even have thought that he was another god distinct from Allah:

> Say 'Call upon Allah or call upon the Most-merciful.' Whichever you call upon, His are the most beautiful names ... (17.110).

Here, the problem is resolved by declaring that ar-Rahmān – the Most-merciful – is only *one* of Allah's names. This rather neat solution was reinforced by the name ar-Rahmān subsequently being dropped except in the expression ar-Raḥmān ar-Raḥīm, 'the Most-merciful, the All-merciful', which makes it almost adjectival.

5.6 Concluding discussion

As regards the broad distinction between Meccan and Madīnan surahs, there is little to choose between Nöldeke's scheme and the standard Egyptian chronology. The only difference is that he classified Surahs 13, 55, 76 and 99 as Meccan, whereas the editors of the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur'an subsequently classified them as Madīnan. The standard Egyptian chronology is not, however, based on unanimous tradition, and for each of these four surahs it is possible to find classical authorities who favoured a Meccan date.

More questionable is Nöldeke's assignment of the Meccan surahs to three distinct periods. These three periods cannot be correlated with the three phases of the Meccan ministry (an initial phase of secret preaching, followed in turn by a phase of public preaching, and a phase of worsening opposition) whose existence is implied by the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature.[27] Moreover, although the surahs of Nöldeke's first period are stylistically relatively homogeneous, the only notable difference between those of the second period and those of the third is the greater incidence of Madīnan additions in the latter. The presence of Madīnan additions is not, however, a very reliable criterion for dating, because the changed circumstances of the Muslims, brought about by the migration to Yathrib, might well have necessitated the revision of some of the early revelations as well as the more recent ones.

Nöldeke's attempt to put the surahs in chronological order is even more questionable. From my brief discussion of his treatment of the Madīnan surahs, it should be clear that the evidence he adduces for determining the order in which they were revealed is often slender. The problem is that these surahs contain very few unambiguous references to incidents which can be dated accurately. For instance, if we take seriously the tradition that Muhammad engaged in over seventy expeditions,[28] we cannot simply assume that a rather vague allusion to a recent victory, such

as that found in 47.35, necessarily refers to the celebrated victory at Badr. With the Meccan surahs, the position is worse. Nöldeke was convinced that after the first burst of poetic inspiration Muhammad's creative powers gradually declined, and that the style of the surahs consequently became progressively more prosaic. This conviction owes more to nineteenth-century German Romanticism than to an examination of the evidence. The most that can be said with certainty is that the style of those surahs which indubitably reflect the Madīnan context of Muhammad's ministry is different from that of many of the surahs which are generally held to be Meccan. We should not, however, infer from this that the Qur'anic style necessarily evolved in a consistent way, even less that it gradually deteriorated. If the author of the Qur'an is God – as all Muslims believe – we must assume that, after the *hijrah*, He changed the style of the revelations to suit the very different circumstances. If, on the contrary, the revelations were composed by Muhammad – as Nöldeke supposed – the change in style may have been the result of a conscious decision on his part. In neither case, however, are there grounds for denying that the Author, or author, retained the power to revert to the earlier style when it was appropriate. Thus style may not always be a reliable indicator of when and where a surah was revealed. We must therefore reckon with the possibility that, in some cases, Nöldeke's dating of the surahs may have been wide of the mark. In any case, he sometimes relied rather uncritically on the traditional dating, and failed to apply his linguistic criteria consistently, a point which was illustrated in our discussion of Surah 110.

Despite these weaknesses, Nöldeke's chronological scheme has met with widespread acceptance from non-Muslim scholars, not only in Germany but also in France, where it was acclaimed by Régis Blachère, who modified it only slightly.[29] Muslims, on the other hand, generally have serious reservations about Nöldeke's approach, because of his assumption that the style of the Qur'an is that of Muhammad. Nevertheless, a few Muslim scholars who do not question the divine origin of the Qur'an have accepted his dating of some of the surahs. They include Marmaduke Pickthall, the author of a well-known translation of the Qur'an,[30] and Ḥamīd ad-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī, the mentor of Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, whose work will be considered in Chapter 13.[31]

Bell's approach to the Qur'an was more radical than Nöldeke's. His recognition that the style of the revelations probably varied to suit the occasion, and his contention that the revisions carried out during Muhammad's own lifetime were likely to have been more extensive than

Nöldeke and Schwally envisaged, both seem sound. From an Islamic viewpoint, his approach is open to the same objections as Nöldeke's. Nevertheless, although he broke with tradition more radically than Nöldeke did, his work ought not to be rejected out of hand. We saw in the last chapter that it has long been recognized that some of the Meccan surahs have Madīnan additions. Moreover, there are reports that the Prophet said that Gabriel used to visit him and tell him to insert such and such an āyah in such and such a surah. Hence there is a sense in which Bell was actually building on tradition rather than simply disregarding it.

Bell's suggestion that the composition of the Qur'an fell into three main periods is more questionable. The case for thinking that some of the sign passages are older than the contexts in which they now appear is a strong one, but there is no reason to suppose that they are the vestiges of early revelations of which only fragments have survived. That in the Madīnan period the revelations tend to be referred to as 'the Book' rather than 'the Qur'an' is undeniable, but the change seems to have been gradual.[32] Moreover, the texts which he alleges imply that the Qur'an was already complete are ambiguous. For instance, 2.185 may simply refer to the fact that the onset of the revelations occurred during the month of Ramaḍān, an event which was now to be marked by the institution of the month-long fast.

Despite Watt's apparent approval of Bell's interpretation of 15.87,[33] it seems unlikely that this āyah refers to seven oft-repeated punishment stories which were distinct from the Qur'an. The phrase 'seven of the repetitions and the Mighty Qur'an' admittedly caused the classical commentators difficulty, but some of them recognized that the words 'seven of the repetitions' meant 'the seven repetitions' and were a reference to the Qur'an itself, the words 'and the mighty Qur'an' being an addition of praise and glorification.[34] Nor need 'seven' be taken literally, as it is often used in Arabic to denote plenitude. When read in context, 15.87 should probably therefore be understood as a reminder to Muhammad to be content with the Qur'an and its manifold repetitions (cf. 39.23),[35] and not to envy those who lived in luxury.

Bell's analyses of individual surahs must each be judged on their merits. He had a number of brilliant insights but was, I suspect, overhasty in detecting what he thought were revisions. Here I am entirely in agreement with Blachère when he says:

> In many instances the Qur'anic text leads one to suppose that it has been reworked simply because the ideas occur in it with a logic which

is not our own, or in a sequence more subtle than that required by the straightforward meaning, or because of an inner cogency dependent on the verbal expression rather than on the idea expressed.[36]

Finally, Bell's suggestion that the editors sometimes placed groups of āyahs in the wrong surahs is very implausible and has been almost universally rejected. In Chapter 9, I shall show that in the case of Surah 79, such a hypothesis is quite unnecessary.

My criticisms of both the Nöldeke-Schwally surah classification and Bell's more finely-tuned approach may come as a surprise after the apparently fruitful use which I made of them in Section 5. The pattern which emerged when the Nöldeke-Schwally scheme was used to examine the question of carnal rewards in the hereafter was indeed striking. Nevertheless, this pattern may simply be a by-product of Nöldeke's attempt to group together surahs with a similar style and structure, because all the references to youthful female companions occur in surahs which give a detailed description of paradise. The pattern that emerged when the same scheme was used to examine the occurrences of the divine name ar-Raḥmān was equally impressive, but it may in part be Nöldeke's own creation. He seems at times to have argued in a circle, for having observed that revelations of his second Meccan period often contained references to ar-Raḥmān, he was led by the references to ar-Raḥmān in 78.37f. to regard the āyahs as second Meccan. Despite these *caveats*, I am bound to conclude that for all its faults, the Nöldeke-Schwally surah classification, occasionally modified in the light of Bell's insights, is a better working hypothesis than the standard Egyptian chronology. It should, however, be obvious that the problem of the chronology of the revelations is still far from solved. For further progress to be made, research of two distinct types is necessary. First there is a need for thematic studies like those in section 5. Such studies would have to take into account all the Qur'anic references to a specific subject, but without being rigidly tied to any one chronological classification of the surahs. On the basis of each study, one would draw conclusions about the probable chronological order in which the references to the subject occurred. The conclusions would, however, be provisional and might have to be modified or even abandoned in the light of the findings of other researchers working on different themes. The whole enterprise would be rather like trying to solve a difficult crossword puzzle. A solution to clue 5-down may appear outstandingly brilliant, but it is nonetheless only provisional until matching solutions have been found to 11-across, 13-across

and 16-across (or whatever clues intersect with it). Let me give a specific example from the field of Qur'anic studies. Bell studied all the passages which mentioned 'signs', the 'Qur'an' or the 'Book'. Because the first part of Surah 19 refers repeatedly to the 'Book' (19.12, 16, 30, 41, 51, 54, 56), he concluded that it was Madīnan. Welch, on the other hand, examined all the passages which mention angels or other supernatural beings and concluded equally plausibly that Surah 19 is Meccan, because it mentions an angel who appeared in visible form (19.17), whereas in later revelations the angels are invariably invisible.[37] Both scholars cannot be right.

Part Three

Morphology, Structure and Coherence

6

The Formal Elements in the 'Early Meccan' Surahs

6.1 Introduction

A complaint frequently voiced by English readers of the Qur'an is that it is hopelessly disjointed, 'a confused jumble' as Thomas Carlyle put it.[1] Part of the problem is the sudden and unexpected changes in subject-matter: stories about Moses, Noah, and other familiar 'biblical' characters are found side by side with graphic descriptions of paradise and hell, instructions and words of comfort addressed to Muhammad and sweeping criticisms of unbelievers. In order to overcome this sense of confusion, it is necessary in the first instance to recognize that the surahs comprise discrete sections rarely containing more than twenty āyahs, and that many of these sections are in turn composed of shorter units, which may be single āyahs, pairs of āyahs, or groups of three, four or five āyahs. It is often possible to identify the sections and shorter units on the basis of changes in subject-matter and addressee, but the task is certainly much easier for the Arabist who can in addition detect changes in rhyme and rhythm, and the occurrence of different syntactic structures. In this chapter, I therefore propose to examine the types of section and small unit found in the forty-eight surahs which Nöldeke regarded as belonging to the first Meccan period, and to attempt to classify them on the basis of their form and content. It should be clear from the previous chapter that we cannot be certain that all of these surahs are actually early Meccan. Nevertheless, because they are relatively short, and because Nöldeke grouped them together on stylistic grounds, it is convenient to restrict the analysis to them before examining the longer and more intricate surahs of the 'later' periods. Moreover, this was the strategy adopted by Angelika Neuwirth, to whose pioneering work in this field I am indebted.[2]

I shall begin by listing the different ways in which the surahs open. Then, I shall examine the oath, an important small unit which is found in several different types of section. After this, I shall analyse the eschatological sections, narrative sections, signs sections, revelation sections and polemical sections, in each case giving an inventory of the principal small

units of which they are composed. Next, I shall discuss the didactic question, a small unit which is found most frequently in polemical sections but which sometimes occurs in other types of section. Finally, I shall discuss the Messenger sections, and a few miscellaneous small units.

6.2 Surah openings

Most of the the 'early Meccan' surahs begin with oaths, commands, questions, or other linguistic devices which achieve an emphasis stronger than a direct statement.

6.2.1 Juratory

Seventeen of the surahs open with oaths: ten with impersonal oaths, one (Surah 68) with an impersonal oath preceded by a detached letter, four with 'rider' oaths, and two with first-person oaths (see below, 6.3).

6.2.2 Imperatival and liturgical

Eleven surahs open with a command or a liturgical bidding. As the distinction between these two types of opening is not clear-cut, it seems best to deal with them together.

Four of the eleven (Surahs 109, 112, 113 and 114) begin with the singular imperative *Qul*, 'Say!'

Two (Surahs 73 and 74) begin with the vocative particle *yā'ayyuhāh*, 'O', followed by a word denoting the Messenger, and then a series of singular imperatives.

Surahs 1, 87, 96 and 106 begin with biddings, although only the second and third of these is imperatival (see below, 6.6.1).

Surah 55 begins with the divine name the All-merciful and continues with a hymnic signs list (see below, 6.6.2).

6.2.3 Interrogatory

Eight surahs open on an interrogatory note. In Surahs 69 and 101, a catchword provides the cue for a didactic question (see below, 6.9). Surahs 70 and 78 begin with reference to the question of anonymous opponents. In Surahs 88, 93, 105 and 107 respectively, a rhetorical question introduces an eschatological diptych, a reminder of God's favours, a narration, and a polemical description of the person who denies the coming judgment.

6.2.4 Protatic

Five surahs (56, 81, 82, 84 and 99) open with an eschatological prelude, in the form of a protasis, or series of protases, beginning with 'When ...' (see below, 6.4.1).

6.2.5 Other openings

Of the remaining seven surahs, two open with woes (Surahs 83 and 104), and one with a curse (Surah 111).

Only four of the forty-eight surahs open with a statement, but even these are emphatic in some way. Surahs 97 and 108 begin with the particle *inna*, which is often left untranslated but which may be rendered 'indeed' or 'verily'. Surah 80 begins with two verbs in the perfect tense, *'abasa wa-tawallā* ('He frowned and turned away'), but the second verb is an intensive form as indicated by the augment *ta-* and the doubling of the second root letter *l*. Finally, Surah 102 begins with a reproach: 'Gross rivalry has distracted you.'

6.3 Oaths

Oaths are very common in the 'early Meccan' surahs, where they occur singly and in clusters, either at the beginning or at the commencement of a major section.[3] There are three principal forms which, to avoid unnecessary technicality, I shall call impersonal oaths, rider oaths, and first-person oaths.

6.3.1 Impersonal oaths

Most of the oaths begin with the particle *wa-*, which, in this context, means 'By ...!'. Although this is generally understood to be an abbreviation for 'I swear by ...!', such oaths are, strictly-speaking, impersonal. The particle is usually followed by the definite article and a noun. For example:

By the late afternoon! (103.1)
By the daybreak! (89.1)
By the figtree and the olive! (95.1).

The noun may be qualified by an adjective or adjectival expression:

By the sky with its constellations! (85.1)
By the swollen sea! (52.6),

or more commonly by a temporal clause:

By the star when it sets! (53.1)
By the night when it retreats! (74.32).

Oaths of this kind are found singly, in pairs, and in sequences of three, four, six and seven at the beginning of eleven surahs:

52.1–6; 53.1; 68.2; 85.1–3; 86.1; 89.1–4; 91.1–8; 92.1–3; 93.1–2; 95.1–3; 103.1.

In three further instances, they occur in the body of a surah:

51.7; 74.32–4; and 86.11–12.

The majority of these oaths feature cosmic phenomena, references to phases of the day and night being especially frequent. In addition there are oaths by 'the promised day' (85.2), 'the soul' (91.7), 'the pen' (68.2), sacred localities (52.1–4; 95.1–3) and even by God himself (51.23; 91.7; 92.3).

6.3.2 Rider oaths

Four of the surahs begin with a series of three, four or five oaths of the pattern *wa-'l-fā'ilāti fa'lā*.[4] All four of these oath complexes are somewhat mysterious, and it would seem that the cumulative effect of the sound is as important as, or more important than, the precise meaning. The oaths in 100.1–5 appear to describe galloping riders, but in the other three instances – 51.1–4; 77.1–6; 79.1–4 – interpreters differ as to whether riders, stars, winds or angels are featured. In view of the fact that the riders in Zechariah 1.8–11 and 6.1–8 are clearly angelic figures, that Judges 5.20 speaks of the stars as God's warriors and Psalm 104.4 describes the winds as His messengers, none of the four interpretations need necessarily exclude the others.

6.3.3 First-person oaths

Seven surahs include oaths of the form *lā uqsimu bi-*. They are: 56.75; 69.38f.; 70.40; 75.1f.; 81.15–18; 84.16–18; 90.1–3. The traditional explanation is that in these seven instances, the word *lā* ('no', 'not') is redundant, or is used to give added emphasis. Hence, the oaths are translated 'I swear by ...', 'I do swear by ...', or 'No! I swear by ...'. However, when *lā* occurs before a finite verb, its normal effect is to negate it. For example, *lā aqūlu* (6.50) means 'I do not say ...', and *lā as'alukum* (42.23)

means 'I do not ask you ...'. It is sometimes suggested, therefore, that these oaths should be translated, 'I do not swear by ...'.

Like the impersonal oaths, the first-person oaths feature cosmic phenomena, especially phases of the day and night. In addition, they feature the Day of Resurrection (75.1), the soul (75.2), 'this town' (90.1), 'the begetter and what he begot' (90.3), and 'the Lord of the two Easts and the two Wests' (70.40).

Whereas the rider oaths invariably occur at the beginning of surahs, and the impersonal oaths usually do, the majority of the first-person oaths occur at a later point.

6.3.4 Oath-predicates

In ordinary life, human beings generally make oaths in order to solemnize, corroborate, or add force to statements. The oaths in the Qur'an, of which God is the implied speaker, function in a similar way.

The rider oaths are closely related to eschatological material. Those in 79.1–5 build up to an eschatological section; those in 51.1–5 and 77.1–6 add solemnity to polemical statements about the certainty of the coming catastrophe; and those in 100.1–5 introduce a categorical denunciation of humankind, which leads in turn to an eschatological section.

The impersonal oaths introduce statements about eschatology (52.7–8 and 74.35–37); statements about the revealed status of the Qur'anic message (51.23b; 53.2–6a; 86.13–14); a curse (85.4); words of comfort to the Prophet (68.2; 93.3–5); and various polemical assertions (51.8–9; 84.19; 86.4; 91.9–10; 92.4; 95.4–5; 100.6–8; 103.2). In one instance, the oath is followed by a rhetorical question (89.5), which leads on to a lesson from history (89.6–13).

The first-person oaths introduce statements about the revealed status of the Qur'anic message (56.77ff.; 69.40; 81.19f.); statements about divine omnipotence (70.40f.; 75.3f.); and polemical assertions about humankind (84.19; 90.4). In one instance, the statement is preceded by a parenthesis which draws attention to the solemnity of the oath (56.76).

6.4 Eschatological sections

Eschatological sections deal with the last things: the impending cosmic catastrophe, the judgment, paradise and hell. Of the 'early Meccan' surahs, eighteen have a single eschatological section:

51.13–19; 52.9–28; 55.37–76; 68.42–43; 69.13–37; 73.14; 78.18–35;

80.33–42; 81.1–14; 84.1–15; 85.10–11; 88.2–16; 89.21–30; 90.17–20; 92.15–18; 100.9–11; 101.4–9; 102.8.

Five have two such sections:

70.8–18,43–44; 74.8–10,38–48; 75.7–13,24–30; 77.8–12,29–45; 83.6–7,14–36.

Two have three:

79.6–8,34–41,46; 82.1–5,13–16,19.

Finally, Surah 99, which comprises only eight āyahs, is devoted exclusively to eschatology.

Within the eschatological sections, there are four types of smaller unit, although in the shorter sections one or more of these may be absent. For convenience the units may be labelled as preludes, proceedings, diptychs and flashbacks.

6.4.1 Preludes

The preludes catalogue the cosmic catastrophes which precede the Judgment. They sometimes also mention other preliminaries such as the assembling of the evidence and the preparation of paradise and hell. For the most part the verbs are in the passive voice or are middle-reflexive forms. In addition to giving the Arabic a repetitive incantatory quality, this creates a tense impersonal atmosphere and impresses on the hearer the inevitability of what is about to occur.

If the prelude is at the very beginning of a surah, the first word is invariably *idhā*, 'When ...', which is repeated after each item or each pair of items in the list. The longest prelude is 81.1–13, which refers to the time when the sun is extinguished, the stars slip out of place, mountains travel along, ten-month camels are neglected, wild beasts are herded together, seas overflow, souls are reunited with their bodies, buried girls are asked why they were killed (an allusion to the pre-Islamic practice of infanticide), scrolls are unrolled (containing the evidence of men's deeds), the sky is removed, hell is set ablaze, and the garden is brought close. Shorter preludes of this nature are found at 56.1–6; 82.1–4; 84.1–5; and 99.1–3.

Preludes which occur after a non-eschatological section open in one of five ways:

(*a*) *fa-idhā*, variously translated; 'And when ...', 'So when ...', or 'Therefore when ...' (or sometimes rather misleadingly 'When ...'), 55.37; 69.13–17;[5] 74.8; 75.7–9; 77.8–11.

(*b*) *fa-idhā ... yawma ...*, 'And when ... on a day ...', 79.34–36; 80.33–37.

(*c*) *kallā idhā*, variously translated 'Nay! When ...', 'No indeed! When ...' 'Yea! When ...', 75.26–29; 89.21–22.

(*d*) *a-lam ya'lam idhā*, translated 'Does he not know that when ...', 100.9b–10.

(*e*) *yawma*, 'On a day that ...', 52.9–10; 68.42–43a; 73.14; 78.18–20; 79.6–7; 83.6; 101.4–5.

6.4.2 *Proceedings*

In contrast to the preludes, which are often very detailed, the proceedings are usually brief, consisting of no more than a summary statement about people's frightful plight when their guilt is exposed. The expression *yawma'idhin*, 'on that day', usually occurs at least once, as in 52.11–14; 55.39; 69.18; 74.9–10; 75.10–13; 75.30; 79.8; 82.19b; 89.25–26; 99.4–6; 100.11; and 102.8. It may, however, be absent, as in 81.14.

Whereas the preludes are always impersonal, the proceedings occasionally refer to 'thy Lord' (as at 75.12,30; 99.6) or 'you' (as at 69.18; 102.8), thereby evoking the revelatory and polemical context.

6.4.3 *Diptychs*

A number of surahs contain contrasting pictures of the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked. Although the two panels of the diptych are not necessarily of equal size, the presence of a contrast is often signalled by one of four syntactic devices:

(*a*) *fa-ammā ... wa-ammā ...*; 'Then as for ... but as for ...'. This construction is employed at 69.19–34; 79.37–41; 84.7–12; and 101.6–9 to introduce a contrast between those given the account of their deeds in their right hand and those given it in the left; those whose scales are heavy with good deeds and those whose scales are light; or those who are reverently fearing and those who are arrogant.

(*b*) *wujūhun yawma'idhin ... wujūhun yawma'idhin ...* 'Faces on that day ... faces on that day ...'. This is employed at 75.22–25; 80.38–42; and 88.2–8 to introduce a contrast between the resplendent appearance of those destined for paradise and the grimy appearance of those destined for hell.

(*c*) *inna 'l-ladhīna ... inna 'l-ladhīna ...*: 'Those who ... those who ...' This occurs at 85.10–11 and 90.17–20, where the emphasis is more on the

two types of conduct which lead to punishment and reward respectively. Compare 82.13–16, *inna* ... *inna*.

(*d*) *fa-man* ... *wa-man* ...: 'Then whoever ... and whoever ...' is found at 99.7–8, where it introduces a contrast between whoever does an atom's weight of good and whoever does an atom's weight of evil.

In Surah 56, the positive panel of the diptych is further divided, thus implying a distinction between two levels of blessedness: that of the 'outstrippers' (vv.10–26) and the 'companions of the right' (vv.27–40). This may also be the implication of the two pairs of gardens which feature in the previous surah (55.46–60, 62–76).

6.4.4 *Flashbacks*

Finally, many of the eschatological sections contain one or more flashbacks. In 75.31–34; 78.27–30 and 84.13–15, the flashback is self-contained. In the remaining instances, it is embedded in a diptych or other small unit, as at 51.14b; 51.16–19; 52.14; 52.26–28; 56.45–48; 68.43b; 69.20; 69.33–34; 70.17–18; 74.43–47; and 83.29–32.

Most of the flashbacks depict the earthly life of the wicked and give the grounds for their punishment. Flashbacks depicting the former life of the righteous are much rarer, occurring only at 51.16–19; 52.26–28; and 69.20. This suggests that the primary function of this type of small unit is polemical, incorporating a scarcely-veiled attack on the Prophet's opponents. They are variously accused of neither believing in Allah nor praying; calling the proclamation a lie and rejecting Allah's signs; denying the resurrection of the dead, judgment and hellfire; wanting to hasten the Day of Recompense (as proof of its existence); mocking the believers; living in ease with their families, hoarding their wealth and not feeding the needy.

6.5 *Narrative sections*

Ten of the surahs include a section which relates a lesson, or lessons, from history: 51.24–47; 53.50–54; 68.17–32; 69.3–12; 73.15–16; 79.15–26; 85.4–9, 17–18; 89.6–13; 91.11–15; 105.1–5. The sections range in length from two to twenty-four āyahs and are all concerned with the punishment of past peoples. They comprise four principal types of small unit: narrative introductions, narrations of events, evocations of known events and narrative conclusions.

6.5.1 Narrative introductions

Two narrative introductions occur more than once. Both of them are questions addressed to the individual:

> Hast thou not seen how thy Lord dealt with X? (89.6; 105.1).

> Has the account of X reached thee? (51.24; 79.15; 85.17)

The latter formula is also used at 88.1 to introduce an eschatological section – an account of what will happen.

In two instances, the narrative introduction is spoken by God in the first person plural and is markedly polemical. In the one He speaks about the unbelievers; in the other He addresses them directly.

> We shall test them just as We tested the owners of the garden when ... (68.17a).

> We have sent a messenger to you to act as a witness concerning you, just as We sent a messenger to Pharaoh (73.15).

The rather abrupt beginning of the narrative section in 53.50, with the words 'And that ...', becomes intelligible when it is recognized that the section is the last of a series which summarizes the teaching of 'the scrolls of Abraham and Moses', mentioned in v.38.

69.3 begins with a didactic question, and 85.4 begins with a curse (see below, 6.9; 6.8.2).

The only narrative section which is entirely devoid of an introduction is 91.11–15. In this instance the narration is best understood as illustrating the point made in the previous āyah, namely that the person who hides or buries his soul will be in a hopeless state.

6.5.2 Narrations of events

Only five of the surahs contain relatively complete stories:

91.11–15 Thamūd,
105.4–5 The owners of the elephant,
79.15–26 Moses and Pharaoh,
68.17b–32 The owners of the garden,
51.25–36 Abraham's guests.

If we discount the introductions and conclusions, the first three are straightforward third-person narrations which describe how God punished rebellious peoples in the past. The other two may both be

divided into two parts, on the basis of discourse analysis. In the story of the owners of the garden, a summary of the incident, 68.17b–20, in which Muhammad is addressed as 'thou', is followed by vv.21–32, a third-person narration of the owners' reaction. In the story of Abraham's guests, a third-person narration of the visitation and annunciation, 51.25–34, which ends with the guests addressing Abraham as 'we', is followed in vv.35–36 by God's first-person-plural account of His subsequent rescue of the faithful few, and destruction of the sinful majority.

6.5.3 Evocations of known events

The 'early Meccan' surahs include seven accounts of past events, or series of events, which are so allusive as to be scarcely intelligible except to those who know the stories already. Three are straightforward third-person narrations:

> 85.5–9a The owners of the ditch,
> 85.17–18 The hosts of Pharaoh and Thamūd,
> 53.50–54 'Ād, Thamūd, Noah, the overthrown cities.

One is a first-person-plural narration:

> 73.15–16 Pharaoh.

One is addressed to the individual:

> 89.6–13 'Ād, Iram, Thamūd, Pharaoh.

One breaks neatly into a first-person plural narration followed by a third-person narration, each comprising five āyahs:

> 51.38–42 Moses and Pharaoh, 'Ād; 43–47 Thamūd, Noah.

The final instance, 69.4–12, evokes the same events as this, but in a different order. It is particularly complex, for it begins with a third-person narration of the stories of Thamūd and 'Ād (vv.4–7a), which concludes in an address to the individual:

> Thou mightest have seen the people prostrate in it as if they were the trunks of felled palm trees. Doest thou see any survivors from them? (vv.7b–8).

This is followed by a third-person evocation of the story of Pharaoh (vv.9–10) and a first-person plural allusion to the flood, which is addressed to the hearers as if it concerned them directly:

> When the water overflowed We loaded you on the vessel (v.11).

6.5.4 Narrative conclusions

Four of the sections have formulaic conclusions. All four emphasize that the purpose of the narration was to convey a lesson.

> In that there is indeed a lesson for one who fears (79.26).

> And We left a sign there for those who fear the painful punishment (51.37).

> Such is the punishment, and the punishment of the hereafter is greater if they did but know (68.4).

> ... that We might make it a reminder for you and that retentive ears might retain it (69.12).

A fifth ends with a more general warning:

> Surely thy Lord is ever on the watch! (89.14).

6.6 Signs sections

Fifteen of the 'early Meccan' surahs include a section which lists some of the signs of the Creator's power and beneficence:

> 51.20–22, 47–49; 53.43–49; 55.1–29; 56.57–73; 75.36–40; 77.20–27; 78.6–16; 79.27–33; 80.18–32; 82.7–8; 86.5–7; 87.1–5; 88.17–20; 90.8–10; 96.1–5.

These sections may be broken into shorter units comprising biddings, hymnic signs lists, ethical inferences, rhetorical questions concerning the Creator and His creation, third-person signs controversies, and first-person signs controversies.

6.6.1 Biddings

Surah 87 begins with an explicit liturgical bidding, which is introduced by a singular imperative:

> Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Most High (87.1).

The same is true of Surah 96, if we translate the first word as 'Recite' rather than 'Read':

> Recite in the name of thy Lord ... (96.1a).

> Recite, and thy Lord is the most generous ... (96.3)

Surah 106 also opens with a bidding, but the verb is a jussive plural:

> Because of habitual benevolence to the Quraysh,
> Because of habitual benevolence to them in the winter and summer caravans,
> Let them worship the Lord of this House (106.1–3).

Finally, despite the absence of a verb, the second āyah of the *fātiḥah* also functions as a call to worship:

> Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds (1.2).

6.6.2 Hymnic signs lists

Three of the four surahs which have opening biddings continue with third-person inventories of God's works. In Surah 106.4, this amounts to no more than a brief statement about His having provided food and security. In Surah 96 the inventory in vv.1b–5 is more obviously hymnic, referring as it does to the creation of humankind and the imparting of divine instruction. The same is true of Surah 87, which continues:

> Who created and shaped
> Who proportioned and guided
> Who brought forth the pasturage
> And transformed it into blackened stubble (87.2–5).

Here, however, the hymnic atmosphere is suddenly and very effectively disrupted by the fifth āyah, which evokes the coming judgment, in language reminiscent of Amos's description of the pastures of the shepherds morning and the top of Carmel withering as YHWH storms out of Zion (Amos 1.2).

Surah 55 lacks a bidding, but the first āyahs are unmistakably hymnic, and have the same theme as 96.1b–5:

> The All-merciful
> He taught the Qur'an
> He created man
> He taught him the Explanation (55.1–3).

The hymnic signs list is continued in vv.4–7, 10–12, 14–15, 17, 19–20 and 22–29, but interspersed with other material.

The signs section in 53.43–49 also appears to be hymnic. The absence of a bidding in this instance is explained by the fact that it is part of a summary of the teaching of previous scriptures.

6.6.3 Ethical inferences

In Surah 55, the hymnic signs list is interrupted at one point by an ethical inference. Reference to the All-merciful's having created the sky and the balance (the constellation of Libra?) provides the occasion for instruction about honesty:

> ... so that you should not transgress in the scales.
> Weigh with justice and do not skimp in the scales (55.8–9).

6.6.4 Rhetorical questions concerning Creator and creation

Surah 55 begins, as we have seen, in hymnic mode with a third-person signs list, which is interrupted by an ethical inference. The inventory is resumed in v.10, but from v.13 onwards it is punctuated by the refrain:

> So which of the benefits of your Lord will you two deny?

Thus, despite its sustained lyrical qualities, the signs list has a polemical function.

In Surah 79, the signs section begins with a rhetorical question:

> Were you harder to create or the sky He built? (79.27).

This takes the ensuing list of signs out of the realm of worship into that of controversy, the works of the Creator being adduced as proof that He is able to recreate man at the resurrection. The same is even more the case with 75.38–39, which is preceded by two rhetorical questions (75.36–37), and followed by a third (75.40).

6.6.5 Third-person signs controversies

The distinction between hymnic signs lists and third-person signs controversies is not hard and fast. We have seen that even the relatively pure hymnic signs lists, in Surahs 55 and 87, have a polemical twist to them. Conversely, the only feature which differentiates the lists in 75.38–39 and 79.28–33 from hymnic lists is that they are preceded by rhetorical questions rather than biddings.

Whereas in Surahs 55, 75 and 79 the rhetorical questions can easily be detached from the signs lists, there are other instances where the controversial tone is more pervasive. For example, the whole of 82.6–8 is in the form of a question, and the second person singular personal pronoun recurs no less than six times in these āyahs:

> O humankind, who has lured thee away from thy Gracious Lord, who created thee, fashioned thee, proportioned thee, and composed thee in whatever shape He wished? (82.6–8).

Similar third-person signs controversies occur at 51.20–22; 86.5–7; 80.18–20; and 88.17–20.

6.6.6 First-person signs controversies

First-person signs controversies occur at 51.47–49; 56.57–73; 77.21–27; 78.6–16; and 90.8–10. In these, the Creator enumerates His own deeds. The controversial tone is maintained by rhetorical questions and by exclamations such as 'If you would only acknowledge it!' (56.57), 'If you would only recall it!' (56.62), 'How excellent the Determiner! (77.23b), and so on.

6.7 Revelation sections

Seven of the surahs include substantial material concerning the revealed status of the message:

> 53.1–18, 59–61; 56.75–82; 69.38–51; 74.49–56; 80.11–16; 81.15–29; 97.1–5.

A further six have briefer sections dealing with the same subject:

> 51.23; 68.52; 73.19; 85.21–22; 86.11–14; 87.18–19.

The sections comprise impersonal or first-person oaths (dealt with above in 6.3); affirmations about the status of the message; accounts of the Prophet's visions; rebuttals of accusations made by the Prophet's contemporaries; a dramatic disclaimer that he could have forged the revelations with impunity; polemical criticisms of those who denied the authenticity of the revelations; and a festal legend.

In Surah 53, there are two revelation sections: one at the beginning and a shorter one at the end. In no less than seven of the other surahs – 68, 69, 74, 85, 81, 86 and 87 – the revelation section occurs at, or near, the end.

6.7.1 Affirmations concerning the status of the message

There are twenty relatively brief statements about the status of the message. Seven of them concern its function as a reminder:

It is none other than a reminder to the worlds (68.52, 81.27);

It is a reminder for the godfearing (69.48);

This is a reminder; so let him who wishes take to his Lord a way (73.19);

... It is none other than a reminder for mortals (74.31);

It is a reminder; so let him who wishes remember it! (74.54f. = 80.11f.).

Seven others concern its authenticity or veracity:

It is as true as the fact that you speak (51.23b);

It is none other than an inspiration inspired (53.4);

It is a statement by a noble messenger (69.40 = 81.19);

... something sent down by the Lord of the worlds (69.43);

It is indeed the truth of certainty (69.51);

It is a decisive statement (86.13).

Two concern its relationship to previous scriptures:

This is indeed in the former scrolls,
the scrolls of Abraham and Moses (87.18–19, 53.36f.).

One concerns the Night of Power:

Lo! We sent it down on the Night of Power (97.1).

The interpretation of the remaining three is problematical:

... it is indeed a noble Qur'an
in a treasured book
which none touch except the purified,
something sent down by the Lord of the worlds (56.77–80).

... in honoured scrolls,
uplifted, purified,
by the hands of scribes,
honoured, virtuous (80.13–16).

Nay, but it is a glorious Qur'an
in a guarded tablet (85.21–22).

It is just conceivable that they likewise refer to the presence of the Qur'anic message in the scriptures revered by the Jews and Christians.

However, Muslims have traditionally understood all three passages as references to the heavenly archetype of the Qur'an.

6.7.2 Accounts of the Prophet's visions

Two surahs indicate that the Prophet saw the heavenly messenger who brought the revelations to him. Both of them objectify the Prophet, and hence his visions, by speaking about him to his opponents. Surah 81 states:

> He saw him on the clear horizon (81.23).

Surah 53 implies that he saw him on two separate occasions, which are described in vv.5–10 and vv.13–16, 18 respectively. The whole surah will be examined in the next chapter.

6.7.3 Rebuttals of accusations

Four surahs, including the two which mention the Prophet's visions, contain rebuttals of the charges made against him by his opponents. These rebuttals likewise objectify the Prophet and his experience, by speaking about him:

> Your companion has neither gone astray, nor erred.
> Nor does he speak from some whim! (53.2–3);
>
> His heart does not lie of what he saw (53.11);
>
> His sight did not swerve and it did not wander (53.17);
>
> It is not the statement of a poet ... (69.41);
>
> Nor is it the statement of a soothsayer ... (69.42);
>
> Your companion is not jinn-possessed! (81.22);
>
> It is not the statement of an outcast satan! (81.25);
>
> It is no jest! (86.14).

6.7.4 A dramatic disclaimer

In Surah 69, the process of objectifying the Prophet, by speaking about him rather than letting him speak for himself, reaches a climax in a dramatic disclaimer that he could have forged any of the revelations:

> And if he had fabricated against Us some of the sayings,
> We would certainly have seized him by the right hand.

Then We would certainly have cut his main artery and not
one of you could have prevented it! (69.44–46).

6.7.5 Polemical criticisms of the deniers

Here I will deal only with polemical material which mentions the revelation, and which either occurs within a larger revelation section or constitutes a discrete short unit. Similar material which is found within polemical sections mentioning other matters will be dealt with later in 6.8.1.

In Surah 69, two rebuttals are followed by brief polemical asides:

> ... little do you believe! (69.41b);

> ... little do you remember! (69.42b).

In Surah 53, the first account of a vision is followed by a rebuttal and then by this rhetorical question:

> What! Will you dispute with him about what he sees? (53.12).

The same surah ends on a similar note:

> What! Are you amazed at this discourse that you laugh and you do not weep, and you make merry? (53.59–61).

With these, compare the rhetorical questions in Surah 56, which follow the affirmation about the status of the Qur'an:

> What! Are you amazed at this discourse?
> And do you make a living out of calling it lies? (56.81f.).

In addition, there are two polemical passages in which the rejectors are mentioned but not addressed directly:

> What is wrong with them, that they avoid the reminder, as though they were startled donkeys who had just fled from a lioness? Nay, every man of them wants to be given scrolls unfurled (74.49–52).

> What is wrong with them, that they do not believe? When the Qur'an is recited to them, why do they not prostrate themselves? Nay! But Allah knows what they are hiding! (84.21–23).

6.7.6 A festal legend

97.3–5 comprises three statements about the Night of Power. Together, they constitute a brief festal legend.

6.8 Polemical sections

The polemical context in which the message was originally communicated frequently comes into view. For instance, we have seen that it is alluded to in the eschatological flashbacks (6.4.4), and in the narrative introductions and conclusions (6.5.1 and 4). We have also examined two specific types of polemical unit: signs controversies (6.6.5 and 6) and criticisms of those who reject the revelations (6.7.5). It remains for us to look at the more general polemical material which is found in well over half of the 'early Meccan' surahs. The material is quite diverse and is not always concentrated in discrete sections. In addition to oaths and questions which, as we have seen, sometimes introduce polemical material (6.3.4), it consists principally of woes, curses, categorical denunciations, reproaches, warnings, lampoons and apostrophes.

6.8.1 Woes

Woes are introduced with the words 'Woe to those who ...' or 'Woe to every ...'. Surah 83 opens with a pronouncement of woe on the cheats who give false measure but expect to receive what is due to them (83.1–3). Surah 104 opens by likewise castigating every backbiting slanderer who hoards wealth, reckoning it will make him immortal (104.1–3). The second half of Surah 107 pronounces woe on those who are hypocritical in their prayer and refuse help (107.4–7). Surah 51 concludes with a woe against unbelievers (51.60). Finally, the words 'Woe on that day to those who accuse of falsehood' occur once in 83.10, and ten times in 77.15–49, where they function as a refrain.

6.8.2 Curses

In at least three 'Early Meccan' surahs, and possibly in as many as six, there is a curse or imprecation. The uncertainty about the precise number arises from the ambiguity of the perfect tense of the verb. Usually it indicates an action which is completed, but occasionally it functions as an optative. Hence *qutila*, the third person singular masculine perfect passive of the verb 'to kill', usually means 'he was killed', but it can also mean 'may he be killed!', 'let him be damned!', or 'curse him!'. In 51.10, 74.19f., and 80.17 this verb introduces curses on those who conjecture about the Day of Recompense; the affluent who stubbornly reject God's signs; and unbelieving humanity in general. In 85.4, where this same verb occurs, the meaning is probably 'Cursed be the owners of the ditch', but

some interpreters deny this and render the āyah, 'The owners of the ditch were killed'. A similar problem arises with the verb *tabbat* in Surah 111.1. Most scholars suppose that this is a curse directed against one of the rich and powerful Meccans, who made life difficult for Muhammad and his little band of followers: 'Perish the hands of Abū Lahab ...!' If, on the other hand, it is a Madīnan revelation, it could be a statement of fact: 'The influence of Abū Lahab has perished ...!' Finally, in 75.34f. the words *awlā la-ka*, which are often translated 'nearer to thee!' (or even 'woe to thee!'), refer to the approaching Day of Resurrection, and literally mean either 'may He cause (it) to come closer to thee' or 'He has caused [it] to come closer to thee'.

6.8.3 Categorical denunciations

There are four third-person categorical denunciations of humankind (*al-insān*). The first two stand by themselves, whereas the third is prefaced by a series of rider oaths, and the fourth by a single impersonal oath.

> Humankind has been created restless,
> when evil touches him, impatient,
> when good touches him, niggardly (70.19–21).

> Humankind indeed acts insolently;
> he considers himself self-sufficient (96.6–7).

> Humankind is grudging towards his Lord
> and indeed he is a witness against that.
> Indeed he is passionate in his love of wealth (100.6–8).

> Humankind is indeed at a loss (103.2).

In addition, there are two categorical denunciations in which the speaker employs the first person plural. Both are preceded by a series of impersonal oaths:

> We created humankind in trouble (90.4).

> We created humankind in the fairest stature
> and reduced him to the lowest of the low (95.4–5).

6.8.4 Reproaches

Whereas the categorical denunciations are statements about humankind, the reproaches are addressed to humankind or to specific groups of human beings. For instance:

Gross rivalry diverts you,
until you visit the tombs! (102.1–2).

Apart from this one instance, they are preceded by *bal*, 'rather', or *kallā bal*, a particle of reprimand which is usually translated 'by no means!' For instance:

Rather you prefer the life of this world
yet the hereafter is better and more enduring (87.16–17).

The grounds of reproach are over-attachment to this life (75.20–21), denial of the coming judgment (82.9) and greed (89.17–20).

6.8.5 Warnings

There are several direct warnings concerning ultimate accountability. For example:

O humankind, thou art constantly toiling towards thy Lord
and thou shalt meet Him! (84.6).

Over every soul there is a watcher (86.4).

Yet there are over you watchers,
noble writers.
They know what you do (82.10–12).

Compare 73.17–18 and 102.3–7. To these may be added 55.31–35, which is peculiar in that it is addressed to both humankind and jinn, and includes a challenge to them to penetrate the confines of sky and earth.

Finally, 51.50–51 is unusual in that, suddenly and unexpectedly, the speaker is a human messenger. For God would hardly say:

Flee to Allah. I am a plain warner to you from Him…

6.8.6 Lampoons

Surah 111.2–5 is the only instance in which the Qur'an lampoons a named individual, but there are a number of passages satirizing anonymous opponents of the Prophet. Three are introduced by the question 'Hast thou seen him who …?' (107.1–3; 96.9–18; 53.33–37). Three begin 'Leave me with …!' (68.44–47 and 51; 73.11a, 12–13; 74.11–18 and 21–26). Others are introduced by 'What is wrong with …?' (70.36–38), 'Does he reckon …?' (90.5–11), 'Or do they say …?' (52.30–44), and 'Do not obey the …!' (68.8–16). One follows a woe (104.2–4).

The lampoons frequently mimic the words and deportment of the

unbelievers and achieve their effect more by rhyme and rhythm than by the meaning of the words. This is difficult to convey in English, although the following extract gives something of the flavour of the original:

> Then he looked
> Then he frowned and scowled
> Then he stepped back, glanced around haughtily
> And said, 'This is only magic handed down.
> This is only the statement of a mortal!' (74.21–25).

Another frequent device is for the lampoon to end on a faintly comic note, with a description of the ultimate humiliation of the culprit:

> We shall brand him on the snout! (68.16).

> I'll roast him in *saqar*! (74.26).

> ... We shall drag him by the forelock
> the lying, sinful forelock! (96.15f.).

A feature of the Qur'anic lampoons which is unlikely to go unnoticed is that Allah uses both 'I' and 'We' as self-designations, switching disconcertingly from the one to the other, as in these two extracts:

> So leave Me and him who rejects this announcement. We will overtake them by degrees, from whence they perceive not. And I do bear with them, surely My plan is firm (68.44–5).

> And yet he desires that I should add more! By no means! Surely he offers opposition to Our signs. I will make a distressing punishment overtake him (74.11–17).

This feature of the Qur'anic style, which is known technically as *iltifāt*, will be discussed at length in Chapter 11.

6.8.7 Apostrophes addressed to unbelievers

Whereas in the Qur'anic lampoons the culprits are referred to as 'him' or 'them', in the apostrophes they are addressed in person, either in the singular as 'thou', at 95.7–8, or in the plural as 'you', at 68.36–39 and 81.26.

6.9 Didactic questions and answers

Ten surahs have one or more didactic questions of the form 'And what will make thee comprehend what X is?'. In six instances the context is polemical and the object or concept to be comprehended is linked in some

way with the coming judgment. For example, the lampoon in Surah 74 ends with the words

> I'll roast him in *saqar*! (74.26).

The word *saqar*, which I have deliberately left untranslated because of its obscurity, occurs only here and in 54.48. It must have required explanation from the first. Hence the didactic question and the lurid answer which follow in vv.27ff. The same applies to the *ḥuṭamah* in 104.4, which occurs in an almost identical context, and which is treated in much the same way. Surah 101 opens with the obscure word *al-qāri'ah*, which is immediately followed by a didactic question. The answer includes the word *hāwiyah*, which is even more obscure, and leads to a further didactic question and answer in vv.10f. In the other three instances, the general purport of the term is clear enough: 'the Reality', 69.1–3; 'the day of Judgment', 82.17–19; or 'the day of Separation', 77.13–14, but the didactic question allows for further elaboration.

In Surah 83, the didactic questions (vv.8 and 19) occur within the eschatological sections and are a reminder of the overriding polemical context.

The structure of Surah 90 is intriguing. The polemical context and the rhetorical question in v.5 lead one to expect that 'the Steep' in v.11 is yet another name for the gruelling ordeal of the Day of Judgment. What could be more natural therefore than the didactic question in v.12? But there is a sudden twist. Instead of yet another reminder of hellfire, the sceptic receives instructions concerning his obligations to the poor and needy.

The remaining two instances seem not to be polemical. In 86.2, the question introduces an explanatory gloss on the obscure word in the initial oath. In 97.2 it provides the cue for extolling the virtues of *Laylat al-Qadr*, traditionally held to be the night in Ramaḍān on which the angel Gabriel brought the Qur'an down to the nearest heaven and communicated the first revelation to the Prophet.[6]

6.10 Messenger sections

An individual addressee is implied, as we have seen, in many of the surah openings (see 6.1), including most of those which begin in an interrogatory, imperatival or liturgical mode. This is also the case with all the didactic questions (see 6.9), some of the narrative introductions (6.5.1), and most of the lampoons (6.8.6). Nevertheless, the content of these

elements of discourse is rarely sufficiently explicit to warrant the assumption that the addressee is exclusively, or even primarily, Muhammad. There are, however, a number of passages which have rather more biographical colouring. These include a commission, calls to devotion and Qur'anic recitation, words of solace, a rebuke, and concluding directives.

6.10.1 A commission

Surah 74 begins with what seem to be words of commission addressed to the Messenger:

> O thou wrapped in a cloak
> Arise and warn!
> Thy Lord magnify,
> Thy garments purify,
> Pollution flee!
> Give not so much thou must ask for more
> And towards thy Lord be patient (74.1–7).

6.10.2 Calls to devotion and to Qur'anic recitation

There are three passages which give instructions concerning Qur'anic recitation and which, in so doing, afford valuable, but tantalizing, insights into the process of revelation. They are 73.1–9; 75.16–19; and 87.6–7. They refer to Muhammad's night-time devotions, the occurrence of revelations at the onset of night, and the need for distinct cantillation. 73.1–9 resembles the commission in 74.1–7 in that it likewise begins with a reference to Muhammad's attire and ends with a call for patience.

6.10.3 Words of solace

There are several passages in which the Prophet receives words of solace. These include 52.29; 68.2–7 and 48–50; 70.5–7; 79.42–46; 88.21–26; 93.3–8; 94.1–6; and 108.1 and 3.

They comprise reassurances that hurtful statements made by opponents are untrue (52.29; 68.2 and 4; 93.3, 108.3), promises (68.3; 93.4–5; 94.5–6), reminders of God's favours (93.6–8; 94.1–4; 108.1), assurances that his sole responsibility is to deliver the message (79.42–46; 88.21–26), and exhortations to be patient (68.48–50; 70.5–7) and watch how God deals with the unbelievers (68.5–7; 96.8).

6.10.4 A rebuke

Uniquely, in Surah 80.3–10, God addresses words of criticism to the Prophet for his off-handed treatment of a blind man.

6.10.5 Concluding directives

Ten surahs end with brief directives in the second person singular.

In Surahs 93, 94 and 108 the directive concludes a section addressed to the individual in which it is preceded by a reminder of God's favour. The response which God requires is ethical conduct and proclamation of his goodness (93.9–11), single-minded devotion (94.7–8), and prayer and sacrifice (108.2).

In Surahs 69, 84 and 86, the directive follows a Qur'an section and is a call to praise (69.52), to the proclamation of punishment (84.24), or to patience (86.15–17).

In Surah 56, the directive is a call to praise (56.96) and occurs after the eschatological section, although the same words 'Glorify the name of thy Lord the All-mighty' also occur earlier in the surah after a first-person signs controversy (56.74).

In Surahs 96 and 52, the directive occurs after a polemical section. In the former, the Prophet is told not to obey the person who rejects his message, but to prostrate and draw near. In the latter he is summoned to patience and praise.

Finally, Surah 55 ends with a non-imperatival statement of praise.

6.11 Miscellaneous

Most of the material in the surahs of Nöldeke's first Meccan period has now been accounted for. The remainder includes some āyahs which are widely recognized as late Meccan or Madīnan additions, and other material, most of which is probably too theological to be genuinely 'early Meccan'.

6.11.1 Prayers and other formulaic utterances

The second part of the *fātiḥah* is an invocation (1.5–7). The imperatival opening, 'Say', introduces a disavowal of the unbelievers (109.1b–6); an affirmation of the unity of God (112.1b–5); and prayers of refuge (113.1b–5 and 114.1b–4).

6.11.2 Polemic against polytheism

Surah 51.56–59 is apparently directed against the pagan practice of offering food to the gods. It is unusual in that Allah speaks in the first person singular.

Surah 53 includes a polemical section (53.19–25) which is markedly theological and almost certainly a later addition.

6.11.3 Exception clauses and theological riders

Several surahs include āyahs which begin with *illā*, 'except'. Some of these āyahs, notably 84.25; 87.7; 95.6 and 103.3, are much longer than those which precede them. For this reason, they are often regarded as later additions. Critical generalizations of this type can be misleading, and in Chapter 8 it will be argued that 103.3 fits perfectly in its context.

Two other surahs end with theological riders (81.29; 74.56) which are probably later additions.

6.11.4 Explanatory sentences

Surahs 73 and 74 contain an āyah which is noticably longer than the others (73.20 and 74.31). These are clearly later interpolations and are generally held to be Madīnan.

6.11.5 Attribute lists

Five surahs briefly enumerate some of the divine attributes. In 1.2b–4 the list of attributes follows a bidding, and is hymnic. The list at 85.8b–9, 13–16 and the statement in 51.58 occur in polemical contexts, although they have a liturgical ring about them. 112.1b–4 has already been classified as an affirmation of the unity of God, and 114.1b–3 as a prayer of refuge (see above, 6.11.1).

6.12 Conclusion

The order in which the various types of section and small unit have been presented was chosen largely for didactic reasons. We must now briefly summarize the results in a way which highlights the relative frequency of the different types of material. Twenty-nine surahs contain polemical material, but this is very varied and often quite diffuse. Twenty-five surahs contain eschatological material, which is concentrated in discrete

sections, and which is easily classifiable as comprising preludes, proceedings, diptychs and flashbacks. Seventeen surahs contain material addressed to the Messenger in the second person singular. Fifteen surahs contain signs sections, of which the principal constituents are either hymnic signs lists or signs controversies. Ten surahs contain narrative sections. Finally, six surahs contain sections dealing with the status and authenticity of the revelation. All but a handful of very brief surahs include one or more of these six types of section.

Three other features of the 'early Meccan' surahs are particularly noteworthy. First, the fact that most of the surahs begin in an emphatic manner. Second, the frequency of oaths either at the beginning of surahs or the beginning of major sections. Third, the presence of didactic questions usually but not invariably in a polemical context.

7

The Structure of the Meccan Surahs

7.1 Introduction

All but five of the forty-eight surahs which Nöldeke ascribed to the first Meccan period comprise one or more sections, each of which deals with one of six principal subjects: polemic, eschatology, God's personal communication with the Messenger, the signs of God's power and beneficence, lessons from history, and the status and authenticity of the revelation.[1] These types of section, and the small units into which they may be sub-divided, were discussed in the previous chapter. We must now examine how they are combined in whole surahs.

In attempting to give an account of the overall structure of the surahs, I shall make use of the term 'register'. Musicologists employ this term to denote the compass of a musical instrument, or of a human voice. By extension, it is employed by linguists to refer to

> context-dependent linguistic characteristics – either spoken or written, and encompassing any set of choices which are made according to a conscious or unconscious notion of appropriateness to context (vocabulary, syntax, grammar, sound, pitch and so on). If, for example, one switches on a commercial radio station it is normally immediately apparent if an advertisement is being broadcast, for broadcast sound advertisements generally conform to particular register characteristics that make them immediately distinguishable as such, even if one hears them so badly that the actual words used are indistinguishable. There are similar accepted (if changing) registers for church sermons, academic lectures, political speeches, declarations of undying love, and so on.[2]

I contend that, in the 'early Meccan' surahs, the speaker uses a different 'register' for dealing with each of the six principal subjects. I propose to discuss the surahs approximately in order of increasing complexity, dealing first with those in which the speaker uses a single register, before going on to look in turn at those in which He uses two registers, and a selection of those in which He uses three registers, or four or more registers.

The same six principal registers are found in the forty-two surahs which Nöldeke assigned to the second and third Meccan periods, but there they are not necessarily concentrated in discrete sections. For instance, the eschatological material and signs controversies are often embedded in a matrix of polemic. Similarly, āyahs concerning the status and authenticity of the revelation often occur in personal communications addressed to the Messenger. This makes the task of the analyst that much more difficult. Fortunately, however, it is relatively easy to isolate the narrative sections. As a first approximation, we may therefore distinguish between those surahs of the second and third Meccan periods which have extensive narrative material, and those which have little or none. The former may be further subdivided into surahs which begin with the narrative section, and tripartite surahs in which the narrative section is sandwiched between other material. Seven surahs will be analysed in detail in order to illustrate these distinctions. Whenever possible, I shall identify sections and smaller units of the type encountered in the surahs of Nöldeke's first Meccan period. When āyahs or groups of āyahs cannot be labelled in that way, I shall simply summarize their content.

In the final section of this chapter, I shall offer some brief observations about the interrelationship of the principal registers, across the whole corpus of Meccan surahs, paying particular attention to the role of the narrative and signs sections.

7.2 'Early Meccan' surahs in a single register

Fourteen surahs are spoken in a single register. Of these, six are polemical, three are addressed primarily to the Messenger, two are eschatological, one is a narrative, one mentions the signs of God's beneficence, and one is concerned with the status of the revelation. The structure of these surahs will now be summarized, with the rhymes and final assonances indicated in brackets.

7.2.1 Polemical surahs

Surah 103
v.1 Impersonal oath {*-r*}
v.2 Categorical denunciation {*-r*}
v.3 Exception {*-r*}.

Surah 104
v.1 Woe {*-ah*}

vv.2–4 Lampoon {*-ah*}
v.5 Didactic question {*-ah*}
vv.6–7 Answer {*-ah*}.

Surah 111
vv.1–2 Curse {*-ab*}
vv.3–5 Lampoon {*-ab, -ab, -ad*}.

Surah 107
vv.1–3 Lampoon {*-īn, -īm, -īn*}
vv.4–7 Woe {*-īn, -ūn, -ūn*}.

Surah 95
vv.1–3 Impersonal oath {*-ūn, -īn, -ūn*}
vv.4–5 Categorical denunciation {*-īm, -īn*}
v.6 Exception {*-ūn*}
vv.7–8 Apostrophe {*-īm, -īn*}.

Surah 92
vv.1–3 Impersonal oaths {*-ā*}
v.4 Statement {*-ā*}
vv.5–7 Promise {*-ā*}
vv.8–21 Warning and exhortation {*-ā*}.

7.2.2 Messenger surahs

Surah 93
vv.1–2 Impersonal oaths {*-ā*}
vv.3–8 Solace {*-ā*}
v.3 Reassurance
vv.4–5 Promise
vv.6–8 Reminder of God's favours
vv.9–11 Concluding directive {*-ar, -ar, -ith*}.

Surah 94
vv.1–6 Solace {*-rak*}
vv.1–4 Reminder of God's favours
vv.5–6 Promise
vv.7–8 Concluding directive {*-ab*}.

Surah 108
v.1 Solace: Reminder of God's favours {*-ar*}
v.2 Directive {*-ar*}
v.3 Solace: Reassurance {*-ar*}.

7.2.3 Eschatological surahs

Surah 99
vv.1–3 Prelude {*-āla-hā*}
vv.4–6 Proceedings {*-āla-hā, -āla-hā, -āla-hum*}
v.7 Diptych (a) {*-arah*}
v.8 Diptych (b) {*-arah*}.

Surah 101
vv.1–3 Catchword and didactic questions {*-a*}
vv.4–5 Prelude {*-ūth, -ūsh*}
vv.6–7 Diptych (a) {*-uh, -iyah*}
vv.8–9 Diptych (b) {*-uh, -iyah*}
vv.10–11 Didactic question and answer {*-iyah, -iyah*}.

7.2.4 A narrative surah

Surah 105
vv.1–2 Narrative introduction {*-īl*}
vv.3–5 Narration of past events {*-īl, -īl, -ūl*}.

7.2.5 A signs surah

Surah 106
vv.1–3 Bidding {*-aysh, -ayf, -ayt*}
v.4 Signs of God's beneficence {*-awf*}.

7.2.6 A revelation surah

Surah 97
v.1 Status and Origin of the revelation {*-r*}
v.2 Didactic question {*-r*}
vv.3–5 Festal legend {*-r*}.

7.3 'Early Meccan' surahs in two registers

There are five surahs in which the speaker uses two of the principal registers. Three of these surahs combine polemic and eschatology, one combines polemical and narrative, and one combines polemic and material concerning the revealed status of the message.

7.3.1 Surahs with polemical and eschatological sections

In terms of structure, the simplest is Surah 102:

Polemic
vv.1–2 Reproach {*-r*}
vv.3–7 Warning {*-ūn, -ūn, -īn, -īm*}

Eschatology
vv.8–9 Proceedings {*-īn, -īm*}.

Here, the evocation of the proceedings 'on that day' is scarcely more than a continuation of the warning in the previous āyahs, as is evident from the continuation of the same rhyme.

In Surah 100, the polemical section is preceded by a series of oaths, and there is a more developed eschatological section:

vv.1–5 Rider oaths {*-a*}

Polemic
vv.6–8 Categorical denunciation {*-ūd, -īd, -īd*}
v.9a Rhetorical question

Eschatology
vv.9b–10 Prelude {*-ūr*}
v.11 Proceedings {*-īr*}.

The 'rider oaths' are extremely obscure, but the most plausible explanation of them is that they describe horsemen engaged in a dawn raid on an enemy camp. They raise the audience's expectations of hearing about the outcome of the raid, and the booty to be had. Instead the audience are castigated for their love of wealth. Thus, the oaths appear at first merely to solemnize the categorical denunciation which follows them. In the eschatological section, however, the image of the raid is taken up again; it proves to be none other than God's raid on the tombs at the Day of Resurrection.[3]

In Surah 83, four polemical sections alternate with three eschatological sections:

Polemic
vv.1–3 Woe {*-īn, -ūn, -ūn*}
vv.4–5 Rhetorical question {*-ūn, -īm*}

Eschatology
v.6 Prelude {*-īn*}

Polemic
v.7 Statement: Book of the Libertines {*-īn*}
v.8 Didactic question {*-īn*}
v.9 Answer {*-ūm*}
vv.10–11 Woe {*-īn*}
vv.12–14 The Rejectors {*-īn, -īm, -ūn*}

Eschatology
v.15 Proceedings {*-ūn*}
vv.16–17 Diptych (a) the Rejectors {*-īm, -ūn*}

Polemic
v.18 Statement: Book of the Virtuous {*-īn*}
v.19 Didactic question {*-ūn*}
vv.20–21 Answer {*-ūm, -ūn*}

Eschatology
vv.22–28, 34–35 Diptych (b) the Virtuous {*-īm/-ūn*}
vv.29–33 Flashback {*-ūn/-īh*}

Polemic
v.36 Rhetorical question {*-ūn*}.

Note that the three eschatological sections form a logical chronological sequence consisting of prelude, proceedings, diptych and flashback.

7.3.2 A surah with polemical and narrative sections

Surah 91

Polemic {*-āhā*}
vv.1–8 Impersonal oaths
v.9 Promise
v.10 Warning

Narrative {*-āhā*}
vv.11–15 Narration of past events.

The oaths elicit a series of contrasting pairs which permeate God's creation: sun and moon, day and night, heaven and earth, piety and wickedness. This prepares the reader for the further contrast, in vv.10–11, between the person who purifies his soul or makes it grow by charitable acts and the person who hides or buries it. The narrative which follows gives the negative example of someone who took the latter course. It is the story of Thamūd, a people of north-western Arabia who rejected

the messenger whom God sent to them, and who hamstrung the camel which they were asked to water. Quantitatively, the oath complex counterbalances the narrative, both having 71 syllables.

7.3.3 A surah with eschatological and revelation sections

Surah 81

Eschatology
vv.1–13 Prelude {*-at*}
v.14 Proceedings {*-at*}

Revelation
vv.15–18 First-person oaths {*-as*}
vv.19–21 Status of the revelation {*-īm, -īn, -īn*}
v.22 Rebuttal of accusation {*-ūn*}
v.23 Account of vision {*-īn*}
vv.24–5 Rebuttal of accusations {*-īn*}
v.26 Apostrophe {*-īm*}
vv.27–28 Status of the revelation {*-īn, -īm*}
v.29 Theological rider {*-īn*}.

The long prelude, with its description of the cosmic disintegration which will precede the judgment, builds up to the lapidary statement in v.14, and heightens its solemnity:

> Then shall a soul know what it has stored up!

The ensuing revelation section serves to reinforce the thrust of this message by stressing that it was imparted by an angelic being and that it is not the utterance of a madman. The two sections complement one another perfectly; the cosmic cycle elicited in the oaths contrasts with the cosmic disintegration described in the prelude, whereas the apostrophe – 'Where then will you go!' – harks back to the cosmic disintegration.

7.4 'Early Meccan' surahs in three registers

Ten surahs are spoken in three of the principal registers. I propose to discuss the structure of a selection.

7.4.1 Surahs with polemical, signs and eschatological sections

Surah 78

Polemic {*-ūn/-īm*}
vv.1–2 Their questioning about the announcement
v.3 Their disagreement
vv.4–5 Twice-repeated warning

Signs {*-a*}
vv.6–16 We-you signs controversy

Polemic {*a*}
v.17 Warning {*-a*}

Eschatology {*-a*}
vv.18–20 Prelude
vv.21–26 Diptych (a) the Insolent
vv.27–30 Flashback: grounds for punishment
vv.31–35 Diptych (b) the godfearing

Polemic {*-a*}
v.36 Comment addressed to *Messenger*
vv.37–38 Allusion to eschatological proceedings
v.39 Summons
v.40 Reminder.

The three registers are intimately interrelated; the polemic is against those who reject the eschatological message, and the signs section depicts the cosmos as a tent pitched by the Creator – the implication being that when He wishes he can fold it up and usher in the eschaton. The small units in vv.1–5 and vv.36–40 are difficult to classify, and I am in two minds as to whether to classify these ten āyahs as polemical sections or messenger sections. The structure of this surah will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

Surah 82

Eschatology
vv.1–4 Prelude {*-at*}
v.5 Proceedings {*-at*}

Signs
vv.6–8 He-you signs controversy {*-īm, -ak, -ak*}

Polemic
v.9 Reproach {*-īn*}
vv.10–12 Warnings {*-īn, -īn, -īn*}

Eschatology
v.13 Diptych (a) {*-īm*}
vv.14–16 Diptych (b) {*-īm, -īn, -īn*}
vv.17–18 Didactic questions {*-īn*}
v.19a Answer
v.19b Proceedings {*-āh*}.

Here, the signs section focuses on humankind's failure to acknowledge that they are God's creation and that they should consequently expect to be called to account.

7.4.2 A surah with eschatological, signs and Messenger sections

Surah 88 has a signs section and an eschatological section but no directly polemical material. In place of the latter there is a solace addressed to the Messenger, reassuring him that his sole duty towards the unbelievers is to act as a warner:

Messenger
v.1 Question {*-ah*}

Eschatology
vv.2–7 Diptych (a) {*-ah,-ah,-ah,-īʿ, ūʿ*}
vv.8–16 Diptych (b) {*-ah*}

Signs
vv.17–20 Signs controversy {*-at*}

Messenger
vv.21–26 Solace {*-ir, -ir, -ar, -ar, -hum, -hum*}.

Because vv.6–7 have a different rhyme from the rest of the eschatological section, Bell thought that they had been added later.[4] We should note, however, that they describe the inedible and unsatisfying food of the inhabitants of hell. It is, therefore highly appropriate that they end with the guttural *ʿain*, a letter which produces a feeling in the throat of the speaker which is 'suggestive of slight retching'.[5] Another remarkable feature of this surah is that the verbs in the signs controversy are all in the passive voice, with the result that the signs section is grammatically and acoustically similar to the eschatological preludes in some other surahs,

for instance 81.1–13. The auditors are thus implicitly invited to make the connection and infer from the signs section that the Creator will one day undo His work.

7.4.3 A surah with signs, polemical and Messenger sections

Surah 96 ends with material addressed primarily to the Messenger. It also includes a signs section, but instead of an eschatological one, there is polemic with eschatological overtones:

Signs
v.1a Bidding
v.1b–2 Hymnic signs list {*-aq*}
v.3 Bidding {*-am*}
vv.4–5 Hymnic signs list {*-am*}

Polemic
vv.6–7 Categorical denunciation {*-ā*}

Messenger
v.8 Assurance {*-ā*}

Polemic
vv.9–13 Lampoon: present comportment {*-ā*}
vv.14–18 Lampoon: menacing peroration {*-ah*}

Messenger
v.19 Concluding directive {*-ib*}.

The polemic is directed at those who fail to acknowledge God's generosity, which is hymned in the sign section, and who claim on the contrary that they are self-sufficient. Note that, although vv.1–5 are traditionally held to be the first revelation, these āyahs cohere well with the rest of the surah, which clearly requires a later setting.

7.4.4 A surah with eschatological, polemical and Messenger sections

Surah 84 is predominantly eschatological and polemical, but there is a brief concluding directive addressed to the Messenger:

Eschatology
vv.1–5 Prelude {*-at*}

Polemic
v.6 Warning {*-īh*}

Eschatology
vv.7–9 Diptych (a) {*-ih, -īra, -ūra*}
vv.10–12 Diptych (b) {*-ih, -ūra, -īra*}
vv.13–15 Flashback {*-ūra, -ūr, -īra*}

Polemic
vv.16–18 First-person oaths {*-aq*}
v.19 Warning {*-aq*}
vv.20–21 Rhetorical question {*-ūn*}
vv.22 Statement: the Unbelievers {*-ūn*}
v.23 Statement: God's knowledge {*-ūn*}

Messenger
v.24 Concluding directive {*-īm*}
v.25 Exception {*-ūn*}.

The polemic is directed against those who reject the Qur'anic message and do not believe that they will ultimately be called to account.

7.5 Bipartite 'early Meccan' surahs in four or more registers

Surah 55 is dominated by three registers: signs, polemic and eschatology. There is in addition, however, a brief concluding directive addressed to the Messenger. The occurrence of the phrase 'Possessor of Majesty and Splendour' at the end of vv.27 and 78 serves to divide the surah into two principal parts: vv.1–27 and vv.28–78. As most of the āyahs rhyme in *-ān*, only the exceptions will be indicated.

PART I

Signs
vv.1–7 Hymnic signs list
vv.8–9 Ethical inference
vv.10–24 Hymnic signs list {v.11 *-ām*, vv.14–15 *-ār*, v.17 *-āyn*}
vv.13, 16, 18, 21, 23, 25 Refrain/apostrophe
vv.26–27 Hymnic conclusion {v.27 *-ām*}

PART II

Polemic
v.29 Theological statement {*-a'n*}
vv.31–35 Warning and challenge
vv.28, 30, 32, 34, 36 Refrain/apostrophe

Eschatology
v.37 Prelude
vv.39–41 Proceedings {v.41 *-ām*}
vv.43–44 Diptych (a) hell {v.43 *-ūn*}
vv.46–60 Diptych (b1) two gardens
vv.61–76 Diptych (b2) two other gardens
vv.38, 40, 42, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 61, 63, 65, 67, 69, 71, 73, 75, 77 Refrain/apostrophe
Messenger
v.78 Concluding directive {*-ām*}.

The refrain – 'So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?' – is traditionally held to be addressed to humankind and the jinn. It serves to integrate the two parts, as does the predominant rhyme in *-ān*, which is the grammatical sign of duality. In fact, duality is the primary integrating factor: it runs through the description of the creation (sun and moon, stars and trees, heaven and earth, humankind and jinn, and so on) but also through the description of the hereafter, which comprises hell and paradise, the latter being described as two pairs of gardens. We should also note that the relationship between the signs section and the eschatological section is different from that encountered in other surahs. Here, features of the creation, which are mentioned in the former, foreshadow features of paradise, which are mentioned in the latter. See, for instance, the references to fruit and datepalms (v.11, cf. vv.52 and 68) and coral (v.22, cf. v.58).

Surah 56 also has sections devoted to signs, polemic and eschatology, and a concluding directive addressed to the Messenger. In addition, however, it has a revelation section. The surah consists of two principal parts, vv.1–74 and vv.75–97, both of which end with the same concluding directive. The predominant rhyme is in *-ūn/-īn/-īm*, but the many exceptions are indicated.

PART I

Eschatology
vv.1–6 Prelude {vv.1–3 *-ah*, vv.4–6 *-a*}
vv.7–10 Proceedings {v.7 *-ah*, vv.8–9 *-a*}
vv.11–26 Diptych (a1) those drawn close {vv.15,25f.*-a*}
vv.27–40 Diptych (a2) on the right {vv.28–30 *-ūd*, v.31 *-ūb*} {vv.32–34 *-ah*, vv.35–37 *-a*}
vv.41–44 Diptych (b) on the left {v.41 *-āl*, v.43 *-ūm*}
vv.45–48 Flashback

Polemic
– v.49a *Messenger* 'Say!' –
vv.49b-50 Warning (=Proceedings) {v.50 -*ūm*}
vv.51–56 Threat (=Diptych (b)) {v.52 -*ūm*}

Signs
vv.57–73 We-you signs controversy

Messenger
v.74 Concluding directive

PART II

Revelation
vv.75–76 First-person oath {v.75 -*ūm*}
vv.77–80 Status of the message

Polemic
– v.81a *Messenger* 'Say!' –
vv.81b–82 Rhetorical questions
vv.83–87 Challenge: prevent the soul's departure {v.83 -*ūm*}

Eschatology
vv.88–89 Diptych (a1) those drawn close
vv.90–91 Diptych (a2) those on the right
vv.92–94 Diptych (b) the deniers

Revelation
v.95 Status of the message

Messenger
v.96 Concluding directive.

Part I opens with an eschatological section. This begins with a sonorous prelude in which there are three words derived from verbal root *WaQa*ʿ*a*, 'to fall' or 'to befall'. The prelude is followed first by proceedings, and then by a diptych in which the panel describing the fate of the righteous is divided into two, as was also the case in Surah 55. The section culminates in a flashback to the earthly lives of the inhabitants of hell, who used mockingly to question the claim that they would be raised from the dead along with their forefathers. In the ensuing polemical section the Messenger is given an affirmative answer to their question in the form of a warning (which could also be be regarded as a further account of the eschatological proceedings), and a threat (which could also be regarded as a continuation of panel (b) of the diptych). This is followed by a signs

controversy in which the Creator points to the transformations observable in nature, as evidence that He is able to raise the dead in a new form. The appropriate response is to extol the Almighty; hence the concluding directive. Part II opens with an oath by the *maWāQi'* of the stars'. The Arabic word denotes 'the time or place of falling' and is derived from the verb *WaQa'a* mentioned in connection with vv.1–2. There is thus a verbal link between the beginning of the two parts. This oath introduces a revelation section, which serves to reinforce the message by emphasizing its exalted status and celestial origin. In the next section, the polemic is taken a stage further with the issuing of a challenge to the unbelievers to prevent the soul of a dying person from leaving his body. The reference to death is the occasion for a further diptych depicting the fate awaiting the dead in the hereafter. There is another statement about the status of the message, after which the surah ends with a verbatim repetition of the concluding directive which occurred at the end of Part I.

7.6 Other 'early Meccan' surahs in four or more registers

In the remaining twelve surahs of Nöldeke's first Meccan period, the speaker employs four or more of the six principal registers. I propose to analyse a selection of these surahs.

Like the surah which we have just analysed, Surah 75 offers a response to those who deny the resurrection and evokes the unsuccessful struggle to prevent the soul's departure at death (75.26–30, cf. 56.83–7). Here, however, the signs section invites the sceptic to reflect that the Creator who produces human beings from seminal fluid is surely capable of raising the dead.

Polemic
vv.1–2 First-person oaths {*-ah*}
vv.3–4 Assertion in the face of denials {*-ah*}
vv.5–6 Categorical denunciation {*-ah*}

Eschatology
vv.7–9 Prelude (cosmic) {*-ar*}
vv.10–15 Proceedings {vv.10–13 *-ar*, vv.14–15 *-ah*}

Messenger
vv.16–19 Instructions concerning Qur'anic recitation
{v.16 *-ih*, vv.17–19 *-ah*}

Polemic
vv.20–21 Denunciation and threat {*-ah*}

Eschatology
vv.22–25 Proceedings {*-ah*}
vv.26–30 Prelude (psychic) {*-āq*}
vv.31–33 Flashback: catalogue of vices {*-ā*}

Polemic
vv.34–35 Woe {*-ā*}

Signs
vv.36–40 Signs controversy {*-ā*}.

Although this surah often seems rather disjointed in English, it is in fact perfectly coherent. The Day of Resurrection and 'the constantly-blaming soul', which are both mentioned in the initial oaths, are dominant motifs. Note that the 'soul' or 'self' (*NaFS*) is explicitly mentioned again in vv.14f. and is the unexpressed subject of the verb in v.26. The only puzzling feature is the messenger section (vv.16–19), which might, at the first reading, seem out of place. Note, however, that there are a number of verbal links between this and the surrounding material. The God who 'brings together' or 'assembles' the revelation for the Messenger (*JaM'a-hu*, v.17) is the God who will bring together sun and moon at the eschaton (*JuMi'a*, v.9), and who will assemble humankind's bones at the resurrection (*naJMa'a*, v.3). The Messenger is told not to move his tongue to 'hasten' (*ta'JaL*) the revelation, whereas his auditors are lambasted for loving 'the hastily-fleeing world' (*al-'āJiLah* v.20). Note, too, that the whole surah is intensely physical, referring as it does to bones, fingertips, faces, the collarbone, and shins, and reaching something of a crescendo in v.37 with an almost orgasmic description of seminal emission:

a-lam yaku nuṭfatam mim maniyyin yumnā
Was he not a drop of semen ejected?

The surah stresses God's control of every bodily function from erection to resurrection. It is not, therefore, at all incongruous for it to contain a reference to His control over the Messenger's tongue. I suggest that in this instance the Messenger section functions in much the same way as the revelation sections in other surahs; that is to say, it serves to confirm that the Qur'anic message is of divine origin.[6]

The same phenomenon – the presence of an intrusive Messenger section giving instructions concerning Qur'anic citation – may also be observed in Surah 87. The rhyme is in -*ā* throughout:

Messenger
v.1 Bidding

Signs
vv.2–5 Hymnic signs list

Messenger
v.6 Call to Qur'anic recitation
v.7 Exception
vv.8–9 Call to remind

Polemic
vv.10–15 Contrasting reactions and fates
vv.16–17 Reproach

Revelation
vv.18–19 Relationship to previous scriptures.

The hymnic signs list ends with an unexpected twist: a reference to God's transforming the pasturage into blackened stubble. This is the cue for polemical material about the coming judgment, but not before the Messenger section which serves to authenticate and add solemnity to it. The surah ends with the assertion that the same message is to be found in the ancient scriptures, which were revealed to Abraham and Moses.

The content of 'the scrolls of Abraham and Moses' is summarized in greater detail in Surah 53, which rhymes in -*ā* throughout, except for v.28 and vv.57–62.

Revelation
v.1 Impersonal oath
vv.2–3 Rebuttal of accusation
vv.4–5 Affirmation concerning status of the message
vv.6–11 Account of vision
v.12 Rhetorical question
vv.13–18 Account of second vision

Polemic
vv.19–22 Polemic against polytheism
[v.23 Later explanation?][7]
vv.24–25 Resumption of the polemic

[vv.26–32 Later explanations?] {v.28 -*a*}[8]
vv.33–37 Lampoon

Revelation-Polemic
vv.38–42 Content of the scrolls: *Eschatology*
vv.43–49 Content of the scrolls: *Signs*
vv.50–54 Content of the scrolls: *Narrative*
vv.55 Rhetorical question
v.56 Affirmation concerning status of the message

Polemic
vv.57–58 Warning {-*a*}
v.59 Rhetorical question {-*un*}
vv.60–61 Reproach {-*un*}
v.62 Summons to worship {-*ū*}.

The initial oath should probably be construed 'By the stars when they set', although other translations are possible.[9] It is an appropriate introduction to the revelation section, which includes an account of the Messenger's vision of a heavenly being who descended and stood poised on the upper horizon (v.7). The revelation section is followed by a polemic against the goddesses whom the Arab pagans worshipped as daughters of Allah. The link with the preceding material is that these goddesses had astral connections; they were regarded as aspects of Venus, the morning and evening star. The polemical section ends by lampooning an unbeliever who turns away and ignores the message. The question is raised as to whether he is aware of the content of the previous scriptures. This gives rise to the next section which includes a summary of their teaching and comprises eschatological, signs and narrative sub-sections. Note that the signs sub-section mentions that God is 'Lord of Sirius' (v.49), a further link with the oath with which the surah began. The ensuing question, 'So which of your Lord's benefits will you distrust?' (v.55), harks back to the earlier question, 'So will you distrust him about what he saw?' (v.12). From then on, the structure of the surah is self-explanatory.

Surah 85 exhibits a symmetrical or chiastic structure, in which the centre-piece is the eschatological diptych which contrasts the punishment awaiting the persecutors with the bliss in store for the believers.

Opening
vv.1–3 Impersonal oaths {v.1 -*ūj*, vv.2–3 -*ūd*}

Polemic
v.4 Curse {*-ūd*}

Narrative
vv.5-8a Evocation of known events: {*-ūd*}

Attribute list
vv.8b–9 {*-īd*}

Eschatology
v.10 Diptych (a) {*-īq*}
v.11 Diptych (b) {*-īr*}

Attribute list
vv.12–16 {vv.12–13 *-īd*, v.14 *-ūd*, vv.15–16 *-īd*}

Narrative
v.17 Narrative introduction {*-ūd*}
v.18 Evocation of known events: Pharaoh and Thamūd {*-ūd*}

Polemic
v.19 Criticism of unbelievers {*-īb*}
v.20 Warning {*-īt*}

Revelation
vv.21–22 Status of the revelation {*-īd,-ūz*}.

Moving out from the centre, it is clear that the attribute lists in vv.12–16 and vv.8b–9 correspond to one another, as do the narrative sections, vv.17–18 and vv.5–8a, and the polemical sections, vv.19–20 and v.4. What is less immediately obvious is that the concluding revelation section, vv.21f., corresponds to the initial oaths, vv.1–3. This is easily missed, because the word *burūj* in v.1 is often translated simply as 'constellations' or 'signs of the zodiac'. The Arabic word is probably derived from the Greek *purgos*, a 'tower', from which (via the Latin *burgus*) we get the English word 'burg', meaning a fortified town. The point is surely that the archetype of the Qur'an, inscribed on 'the guarded tablet' (v.22), is preserved in an inviolable celestial stronghold.[10] For a more detailed analysis of the chiastic structure, I refer the reader to the notes.[11]

Surah 69 has narrative, eschatological and revelation sections. As the addressee in the opening didactic questions and the concluding directive is singular, I have classified vv.1–3 and 52 as messenger sections, although they contain nothing which is specific to Muhammad.

Messenger
vv.1–3 Catchword and didactic questions {*-ah*}

Narrative
{v.4 *-ah*, vv.5–12 *-iyah*}
vv.4–8 Evocation: Thamūd and 'Ād
vv.9–10 Evocation: Pharaoh and the Overthrown Cities
v.11 Evocation: the Flood
v.12 Narrative conclusion

Eschatology
vv.13–17 Prelude {vv.13–15 *-ah*, 16–17 *-iyah*}
vv.18 Proceedings {*-iyah*}
vv.19–24 Diptych (a) {*-iyah*}
v20 Flashback {*-iyah*}
vv.25–37 Diptych (b) {vv.25–29 *-iyah*, vv.30–32 *uh*, v.35 *-īm*, v.36 *-īn*, v.37 *-ūn*}
vv.33–34 Flashback {*-īm, īn*}

Revelation
vv.38–39 First-person oath {*-ūn*}
v.40 Affirmation of authenticity of the message {*-īm*}
v.41a Rebuttal of accusation
v.41b Polemical criticism of the Deniers {*-ūn*}
v.42a Rebuttal of accusation
v.42b Polemical criticism of the Deniers {*-ūn*}
v.43 Affirmation of authenticity of the message {*-īn*}
vv.44–47 Dramatic disclaimer {*-īl,-īn,-īn,-īn*}
v.48 Affirmation of status of the message {*-īn*}
vv.49–50 Polemical criticism of the Deniers {*-īn*}
v.51 Affirmation of authenticity of the message {*-īn*}

Messenger
v.52 Concluding directive: call to praise {*-īm*}.

The catchword *al-HāQQah*, with which the surah begins, literally means 'the Reality'. As it seems to be a name for the coming Judgment, the nearest equivalent in English is perhaps 'the Hour of Truth'. The answer given to the didactic question 'What will teach thee what the Hour of Truth is?' takes the form of a narrative section, which mentions God's punishment of past peoples by natural disasters. This is followed by an eschatological section, which details the coming cosmic disintegration and the rewards and punishments which will be meted out in the hereafter.

Then, there is a revelation section, which serves to authenticate the preceding message. It begins with an oath by 'what you see and what you do not see' (vv.38f.), an allusion to the this-worldly events of the narrative section and the other-worldy events of the eschatological section. It concludes with the affirmation that the revelation is 'the certain truth', *al-ḤaQQu 'l-yaqīn*, thus harking back to the initial catchword and didactic questions in vv.1–3.

Surah 80 has substantial Messenger, revelation, signs and eschatological sections, as well some polemical material:

Messenger
vv.1–2 Lampoon {*-ā*}
vv.3–10 Rebuke {*-ā*}

Revelation
vv.11–12 Affirmation: message as reminder {*-ah*}
vv.13–16 Affirmation: message and archetype {*-ah*}

Polemic
v.17 Curse {*-ah*}

Signs
vv.18–23 He-him signs controversy {*-a*}

Polemic
v.24 Categorical denunciation

Signs
vv.25–31 We-him signs controversy {*-a*}
v.32 [We]-you signs controversy {*-kum*}

Eschatology
vv.33–36 Prelude {*-ah,-īh,-īh,-īh*}
v.37 Proceedings {*-īh*}
vv.38–39 Diptych (a) {*-ah*}
vv.40–42 Diptych (b) {*-ah*}

The Messenger section is unusual in that it is highly critical of the Messenger. He is called to account for off-handed treatment of a blind man and paying more attention to someone who boasted of his self-sufficiency (*istaGHNā*, v.5). Did he not realize that the blind man might have 'heeded' (*yaDHdhaKkaRu*) the message, with the result that the 'reminder' (*DHiKRā*, v.4) would have profited him? This is the lead-in to a revelation section, which begins by affirming that the message is a

'warning' (*taDHKiRah*, v.11) that anyone who wishes may 'remember' (*DHaKaRa-hu*, v.12). Because humankind on the whole do not heed the message, they are next cursed for their unbelief and ingratitude (*mā aKFaRa-hu* v.17). This both harks back to the earlier reference to the unbeliever's claim to self-sufficiency (v.5) and serves to introduce the signs section, which lists the reasons why humankind ought to be grateful to the Creator. The eschatological section, which brings the surah to a close, begins with a prelude, which describes a man fleeing from his relatives on the Day of Recompense. With caustic irony, the next āyah asserts that on that day every man of them will have something to make him self-sufficient (*yuGHNīhi*, v.37, cf. v.5). The diptych contrasts the faces of the believers and the unbelievers (*al-KaFaRah*, v.42 cf. v.17) at the resurrection. The former will be radiant, whereas the latter will be veiled in darkness – as was the face of the blind man in this life.

Surah 79 has eschatological, polemical, narrative, signs and Messenger sections:

Eschatology
vv.1–5 Rider oaths {-*ā*}
vv.6–7 Prelude {-*ah*}
vv.8–9 Proceedings {-*ah*}

Polemic
vv.10–12 Polemical context, question {-*ah*}
vv.13–14 Response {-*ah*}

Narrative
v.15 Narrative introduction {-*ā*}
vv.15–25 Narration of events {-*ā*}
v.26 Narrative conclusion {-*ā*}

Signs
v.27 Rhetorical question {-*āhā*}
vv.28–33 He-you signs controversy {-*āhā*, v.33 -*kum*}

Eschatology
vv.34–36 Prelude {-*ā*}
vv.37–41 Diptych {-*ā*}

Messenger
vv.42–46 Solace {-*āhā*}.

Although it is relatively easy to break the surah into discrete sections, the

relationship between them is not immediately obvious. We saw earlier that Bell regarded it as a pastiche of unrelated fragments.[12] For my attempt to demonstrate that it is a unity, the reader must await Chapter 9.

7.7 *'Middle and late Meccan' surahs with narrative sections*

Sixteen of the surahs which Nöldeke assigned to the second Meccan period, and twelve which he assigned to the third, contain extensive narrative material.

Structurally, the simplest is Surah 71 (Meccan II), which is devoted entirely to the story of Noah. This is a punishment story, like those encountered in the surahs of the previous period, but it is more elaborate. It comprises six brief episodes:

vv.1–4 Noah's mission {*-īm,-īn,-ūn,-ūn*}
vv.5–12 Noah's first complaint {*-ā*}
vv.13–20 Noah's account of his signs controversy {*-ā*}
vv.21–24 Noah's second complaint {*-ā*}
v.25 The punishment of Noah's people {*-ā*}
vv.26–28 Noah's prayer {*-ā*}.

Note that the only indication that this is to be understood as revelation is the statement 'We sent Noah', with which the surah begins. Note, too, how the word 'increase', which occurs in Noah's first and second complaint, and in his prayer (vv.6, 21 and 28), forms a link between the episodes.

Next we may distinguish two surahs (Surah 19, Meccan II; Surah 28, Meccan III) which open with a narrative introduction addressed to the Messenger and which comprise an extensive narrative section followed by other material. Here is an analysis of Surah 19:

Narrative {v.1 *-ād*, vv.2–33, 41–63 *-ā*}
vv.1–2 Detached letters and narrative introduction
vv.3–15 Narrative: Zechariah and John
v.16–33 Narrative: Mary and Jesus

Polemical Interlude {*-ūn/-īm/-īn*}
vv.34–40 Against belief that God has taken a son

vv.41–50 Narrative: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
vv.51–53 Narrative: Moses and Aaron
vv.54–55 Narrative: Ishmael
vv.56–57 Narrative: Idrīs

v.58 Summary: the prophets and response of the guided
v.59 Sequel: those who followed them and were corrupt
vv.60–63 Exception: those destined for paradise

Messenger {-ā}
vv.64–65 Angelic discourse

Polemic {-ā}
vv.66–76 Against those who deny the resurrection
vv.72–87 Against reliance on wealth, posterity, and other gods
vv.88–95 Against belief that God has taken a son
v.96 Those who believe and do good works

Messenger {-ā}
v.97 Instructions concerning the revelation
v.98 Rhetorical question.

The narrative introduction gives the impression that what follows has the status of revelation, an impression which is reinforced periodically by We-thou discourse (vv.7, 12, 17, 21, 40, 49f., 52f., 57f., 63f., 67–70, 72–4, 77, 79f., 83–6, 97f.). At times the narrative moves rather abruptly, for instance in v.12, when John is told to hold fast to the Scripture. Readers who do not have access to the Arabic should bear in mind that the narrative is tailored to meet the exigences of rhyme. They should also remember that the Qur'an was first and foremost an oral recitation, and that it may originally have been accompanied by gestures and changes in tone of voice which would have compensated for the narrative lacunae. Furthermore, in some instances we should assume that the auditors were familiar with the stories, and that only the form of the stories and the purpose for which they were narrated were new to them. The polemical section is intimately related to the narrative. For instance, the criticism of those who deny the resurrection has its counterpart in the references to the day when John and Jesus will be raised alive (vv.34–40 and 88–95, cf. vv.15 and 33); similarly, there is an implicit contrast between those criticized for relying on wealth, posterity and other gods, and the model behaviour of Abraham (vv.72–87, cf. vv.41–50). The first of the two messenger sections (vv.64–65) is unusual in that the implied speaker is not God but rather the revelatory angels, a point which will be discussed further in Chapter 11. The second messenger section is more akin to some of those encountered in surahs of the first Meccan period. The last word of the surah is *rikz* ('slightest sound'). It is a pun on *dhikr* ('mention'), the

word with which the surah begins, and on *Zakarīyā* ('Zechariah'), who is first mentioned in v.2.

Surahs which are tripartite, and in which the middle section is predominantly narrative, are more frequent. The narratives are either punishment stories or edifying stories about the exemplary behaviour of God's prophets and messengers. Structurally, we may distinguish two broad sub-types. First, there are those in which the first and third parts are primarily attestations of their revelatory status, although other themes are often present. To this group belong Surahs 15, 18, 20, 26 and 27 (Meccan II) and Surahs 7, 11 and 12 (Meccan III). Here is an analysis of Surah 12, which rhymes throughout in *-ūn/-īn/-īm*:

Revelation/Messenger
vv.1–2 Detached letters; the status of the revelation
v.3 Address to the Messenger about the revelation

Narrative
vv.4–7 Joseph's dream
vv.8–10 His brothers' plan
vv.11–15 Their plot
vv.16–18 Their lie
vv.19–22 The caravan and Joseph's enslavement
vv.23–29 The attempt to seduce him
vv.30–34 His effect on the women
vv.35–42 His experience in prison
vv.43–49 The king's dream
vv.50–57 Joseph's innocence proved; his preferment
vv.58–62 The first visit of his brothers
vv.63–68 Joseph's plot
vv.69–80 The second visit of the brothers
vv.81–87 The truth
vv.88–93 The third visit of the brothers
vv.94–98 The father
vv.99–101 The dream fulfilled

Messenger/polemic/revelation
v.102 Address to the Messenger about the revelation
vv.103–110 Polemic
v.111 The status of the revelation.

There are numerous studies of this surah by European scholars, who draw attention to its literary artistry.[13] Four features in particular should

be noted. First, the narrator's intermittent comments on the story (in vv.7, 15, 22, 34, 56f. and 68) link the narrative section with the opening and concluding sections of the surah. Second, the recurring motif of Joseph's shirt (*qamīs*, vv.18, 25–28 and 93) has a unifying effect on the plot. Third, the structure of the narrative is loosely chiastic:

a vv.4–7 Joseph's dream
b vv.8–21 His brothers' plot
c vv.23–29 The attempted seduction
d vv.30–33 His effect on the seductress's friends
e vv.35–42 His experience in prison
f vv.43–44 The king's dream
f' vv.45–49 Its interpretation
e' v.50 Joseph's release
d' v.51a The confession of the seductress's friends
c' vv.51b–53 The confession of the seductress
b' vv.54–98 Joseph's plot
a' vv.99–101 Joseph's dream fulfilled

Fourth, while in prison, Joseph delivers what amounts to an Islamic sermon, a point which I shall elaborate in the next section.

In the second type of tripartite narrative surah, the first and third parts are primarily polemical, although here too other themes may be present.[14] This group comprises Surahs 21, 37 and 54 (Meccan II) and Surahs 29 and 31 (Meccan III). Here is an analysis of Surah 54, which rhymes throughout in *-ar/-ir/-ur*:

Polemic/Eschatology
v.1 The splitting of the moon
vv.2–5 Criticisms of the unbelievers
v.6a Instruction to Messenger to withdraw from them
vv.6b–8 Eschatological proceedings

Narrative
vv.9–15 Noah
  v.16 Refrain about punishment
  v.17 Refrain about the Qur'an
vv.18–20 'Ād
  v.21 Refrain about punishment
  v.22 Refrain about the Qur'an
vv.23–29 Thamūd
  v.30 Refrain about punishment

v.31 Punishment of Thamūd
  v.32 Refrain about the Qur'an
vv.33–38 Lot
  v.39 Modified refrain about punishment
  v.40 Refrain about the Qur'an
vv.41–42 Pharaoh

Polemic / Eschatology
vv.43–44 Rhetorical questions
vv.45–46 Warnings
v.47 Categorical denunciation
v.48 Eschatological proceedings
vv.49–50 Theological statements
v.51 Rhetorical question
vv.52–53 Previous scriptures
vv.54–55 Promise.

The structure is self-explanatory.

The remaining narrative surahs begin and end like those mentioned in the previous paragraph, but they are not genuinely tripartite, because of the presence of other major themes in addition to narrative.[15] Twelve surahs belong to this broad type: Surahs 23, 25, 36, 38, 43 and 44 (Meccan II) and Surahs 6, 10, 14, 34, 40 and 46 (Meccan III). One example must suffice. For this purpose I have chosen Surah 36, because of the importance it has in Muslim devotions. It rhymes in *-ūn/-īn/-īm* throughout.

Introduction: Messenger/Polemic
v.1 Detached letters
v.2 Impersonal oath by the Qur'an
vv.3–6 Commission
v.7 Categorical denunciation
vv.8–9 Lampoon
vv.10–11 Instructions
vv.11–12 Warning

Narrative
v.13 Narrative introduction
vv.14–30 Parabolic narrative
  vv.14–19 The envoys
  vv.20–25 A man from the further end of the city
  vv.26–27 His admission to paradise

vv.28–29 The punishment of his people
vv.31–32 Narrative conclusion

Signs/Polemic
vv.33–44 We-they signs controversy
vv.45–50 Criticisms of the deniers
vv.45–46 Their denial of God's signs
vv.47–48 Their refusal of charity
vv.49–50 Their denial of the judgment

Eschatology
vv.51–52 Prelude
vv.53–54 Proceedings
vv.55–58 Diptych (a) paradise
vv.59–64 Diptych (b) hell
vv.65–67 Proceedings + taunt

Conclusion: Revelation/signs etc.
vv.69–70 Rebuttal + affirmation of status of message
vv.71–73 We-they signs controversy
vv.74–75 Criticism of polytheists
v.76 Solace
vv.77–81 He-you signs controversy
vv.82–83 Theological comment + doxology.

The somewhat repetitive nature of the Introduction and Conclusion is accounted for once it is recognized not only that they complement each other but also that they both have a chiastic structure:

Introduction
a vv.1–5 The book of revelation
b v.6 thou warn
c v.7 they will not believe
d vv.8–9 Lampoon
c' v.10 they will not believe
b' v.11 thou warn
a' v.12 The book of reckoning.

Conclusion
a vv.69–70 God's word: revelation
b vv.71–73 The creation of things benefiting man
c vv.74–75 Reliance on other gods
d v.76 Solace for the Messenger about their word

c' vv.77–78 Comparing others with God
b' vv.79–81 The creation of man
a' vv.82–83 God's word: re-creation.

The links between the five principal sections are self-evident and need not detain us, but there are three details which require explanation. The description of the shackles on the unbelievers' necks, and the barriers preventing them from seeing (vv.8–9), is not a reference to punishments meted out to them in the hereafter, but rather to their present inability to see beyond the ends of their noses and understand God's signs (cf. v.45). It is a lampoon in which they are depicted as if they were camels fitted with spiked collars to prevent them from putting their heads down to drink. The parabolic narrative does not describe the death (or possibly even martyrdom) of the man from the further end of the city, but this is clearly presupposed by his admission to paradise (vv.26f.). This poses no problem if what was said earlier about narrative lacunae is born in mind. Finally, the order in which the signs of God's power and beneficence are depicted in vv.33–44 is determined by simile and metaphor. The description of the dead earth which God brings to life includes a reference to 'date-palms'. It is followed by a description of night, day, sun and moon in which the waning moon is likened to an 'old palm frond', and sun and moon are said to 'float' in their orbits. This in turn gives rise to a reference to a 'ship' and 'drowning'.

7.8 Other 'middle and late Meccan' surahs

The remaining fourteen surahs of Nöldeke's second and third Meccan period contain little or no narrative material. They are Surahs 17, 50, 67, 72 and 76 (Meccan II) and 13, 16, 30, 32, 35, 39, 41, 42, 45 (Meccan III). Although Neuwirth suggests that they are all tripartite, this is an oversimplification.[16] Some of them are structurally very complex, as I hope to to show in Chapter 9 by a detailed analysis of Surah 17. Others are relatively straightforward. Two examples of the latter must suffice: Surahs 67 and 72.

For Surah 67, I tentatively suggest the following analysis:

Signs {*-īr/-ūr*}
v.1 Liturgical opening
v.2 He-you signs controversy
vv.3–4 He-thou signs controversy
v.5 We-they signs controversy

Eschatology {*-īr/-ūr*}
v.6 Warning
vv.7–11 Tableau: hell
v.12 Promise: paradise

Polemic/Signs {*-īr/-ūr*}
vv.13–14 God's omniscience
v.15 Sign: subservience of the earth
vv.16–18 Warning: God's power
v.19 Sign: birds held in flight
v.20 Warning: God's power
v.21 Sign: God's provision

Polemic {*-ūn/-īm/-īn*}
v.22 Rhetorical question to unbelievers
vv.23–24 Say + He-you signs controversy
vv.25–27 Question about Eschaton + 'Say' + answer
v.28 'Say' + rhetorical question to unbelievers
v.29 Say + confession of faith + warning
v.30 Say + Sign: provision of water

The decision to treat vv.22–30 as a separate section seems justified by the change in rhyme.

Surah 72 may at first seem very confused because of the occurrence of *wa-an* ('and that') at the beginning of no less than fifteen āyahs, sometimes introducing words spoken by the jinn but at others introducing words spoken by God. To make sense of the structure of the surah as a whole, it is necessary to realize that the initial instructions to the Messenger in v.1a are followed by further instructions in vv.16, 18 and 19:

> Say, 'It has been revealed to me that ... and that ... and that ... and that ...'

From v.1b to v.14, on the other hand, *wa-an* invariably introduces a statement by the jinn:

> They said ... and that ... and that ... and that ... etc.

In these instances it is superfluous and is best left untranslated, although its presence in the Arabic produces an impressive pounding effect. The surah rhymes in *-ā* throughout. I tentatively suggest the following analysis:

Introduction: Instruction to Messenger
v.1a 'Say, "It is revealed to me that ..."'

Revelation about the jinn
vv.1b–3 Anecdote about conversion of the jinn
vv.4–6 The jinn confess their former folly
  v.7 Narrator's polemical aside
vv.8–10 The jinn confess their ignorance
  v.9b Narrator's comment
vv.11–14a The jinn confess that they are divided
  vv.13b, 14b, 15 Narrator's comments

Polemic
vv.16–17 'and that' + reason for the drought
v.18 'and that' + places of worship are for Allah alone
v.19 'and that' + mobbing of the Messenger at prayer
v.20 'Say' + declaration about prayer
v.21 'Say' + denial of power to benefit or harm
vv.22–24 'Say' + messenger's vulnerability and role
vv.25–28 Say + knowledge of the Eschaton.

The link between the polemical section and the preceding material is that the Meccans thought Muhammad was jinn-possessed and that he used the power of the jinn to cause a drought. v.19 probably refers back to the incident already mentioned in vv.1b–3.[17]

7.9 The interrelationships of the registers in the Meccan surahs

Of the six principal registers which are employed in the Meccan surahs, the earliest is probably that of personal communication with the Messenger. This was almost certainly present in revelations which Muhammad received before he began to preach publicly. When, however, one examines the surahs which are spoken exclusively in this register, or the messenger sections of some of the early two-register and three-register surahs, one discovers that other registers are present in embryonic form. Take for instance Surah 93; although addressed throughout to the Messenger, it promises him a reward in the hereafter, reminds him of the material blessings he has received, and instructs him to be generous towards those less fortunate than himself. In other words, it foreshadows the eschatological teaching, the enumeration of God's signs, and the polemic against the selfish materialism of the Meccan

polytheists, which loom large in many of the later surahs. We may surmise that the hostile reaction to Muhammad's public ministry led to various developments. The progressive hardening of the opposition to the message went hand in hand with a progressive intensification of the Qur'anic polemic and an elaboration of the eschatological teaching. When the dire warnings of the coming judgment and the graphic descriptions of paradise and hell fell on deaf ears, the eschatological teaching was reinforced with stories of past peoples who had been destroyed for rejecting God's messengers. When these stories were in turn dismissed as old-wives' tales, they were repeated together with other material – the 'revelation sections' – which affirmed that they were part of authentic revelations vouchsafed to Muhammad. And when the Meccans had the impudence to ask for miraculous signs, they were repeatedly told that there were signs enough of God's power and beneficence in His creation, if only they would reflect on them. Although I have described these developments as if they took place consecutively, the reality is likely to have been much more complex, with all the major registers coming into play at an early stage, but with the predominance of one register gradually giving way to the predominance of another. If Nöldeke's chronology is correct in broad outline, eschatology seems to have been the keynote of the first Meccan period, whereas narrative played a more important role in the second, and signs controversies were more frequent in the third.

The relationship between the six principal registers, which I have attempted to summarize in the previous paragraph, is reinforced in the Qur'anic text by countless verbal echoes which are often lost in translation. In my analyses, I have sometimes drawn attention to the presence of such verbal echoes within individual surahs. It is now necessary to say something about their occurrence across the whole corpus of 'Meccan' revelations.[18] In order to avoid undue repetition, I shall focus my attention first on the narrative sections, then on the signs sections, indicating ways in which they are related to other types of material. As the narrative material is very extensive, I shall restrict the discussion to the Qur'anic representation of four key figures: Noah, Ṣāliḥ, Joseph and Moses.[19]

The Qur'anic story of Noah[20] is a typical punishment story. It is a cautionary tale for the Meccan pagans: a warning of what they could expect if they rejected Muhammad's message. Noah summoned his people to worship Allah and abandon other gods, but they took no notice. Hence God delivered Noah and the believers in the Ark, and destroyed the unbelievers with the flood. The Quraysh would likewise be destroyed

if they continued to reject Muhammad's preaching. The similarity of Noah's mission to that of Muhammad is highlighted by the use of the same vocabulary to contrast the positive and negative responses to their message. Both messengers urged their people to 'believe', 'obey', be 'god-fearing' and 'righteous', but in both instances, the majority 'denied' the revelations and continued to be 'disbelieving', 'immoral' and 'corrupt'. In places, the story has been adapted quite considerably in order to bring it into line with Muhammad's situation. Noah's people are said to have been devotees of Wadd, Suwāʿ, Yaghūth, Yaʿūq and Nasr (71.23) – deities worshipped in Arabia in Muhammad's time, although not mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an. Noah's principal opponents are said to have been the clan chiefs (23.24 etc.), as were Muhammad's in Mecca. In Noah's case as in Muhammad's, the chiefs objected that he was only a mortal and that if God had wished to communicate with them He would have sent angels (23.24; cf. 6.91; 15.7). Noah and Muhammad were also both dismissed as jinn-possessed (54.9; cf. 52.29). Moreover, the content of their preaching is depicted as very similar: in addition to its central monotheistic thrust – the requirement that their people should serve Allah and have no gods beside him (23.23) – we may note that Muhammad was told to say that he was a 'plain warner' (15.89), to insist that he was not asking for payment (38.86), to deny that he possessed the treasures of Allah, knew the unseen, or was an angel (6.8), and to declare that he had been ordered to become a Muslim (27.91), all things which Noah had reputedly said to his people long before (71.2; 11.29; 11.31; and 10.72). Similarly, Noah's preaching allegedly included a signs controversy (71.13–20). We may also infer that the reactions ascribed to Noah's auditors were identical to those of the unbelievers in Muhammad's day: they put their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments and were puffed up with pride (71.7; cf. 2.19; 11.5; and 45.8). Noah's ark is depicted as having been constructed out of planks and palm fibres[21] (54.13), like boats in seventh-century Arabia. Finally the poignant scene in which Noah pleads in vain with his son to enter the ark (11.42–46) probably mirrors the anguish of the Muslims who left relatives behind when they migrated to Yathrib.

The legend of Ṣāliḥ is also a punishment story.[22] Ṣāliḥ was sent to Thamūd, a people who lived in houses hewn out of the rocks. He called on them to worship Allah alone, and he brought them a she-camel with instructions that they were to allow it to graze freely. They took no notice, and killed it. Consequently, after delivering Ṣāliḥ and the believers, Allah

destroyed the rest of the people with an earthquake or a thunderbolt. As with the Noah story, the similarity of Ṣāliḥ's mission to Muhammad's is highlighted by the use of the same core vocabulary to describe the dynamics of faith and unbelief, and by crediting Ṣāliḥ's opponents with raising the same objections as the Meccan pagans. In 27.45–53, there is a further twist to the story. Ṣāliḥ's people complain that he has brought them misfortune, and nine evildoers plot to kill him and his family by night. Allah outwits them with his own counterplot: he delivers Ṣāliḥ and the godfearing before wreaking destruction on the people. This seems to reflect the plot of the Meccans to kill Muhammad, and the counterplot by which he escaped.[23] Finally, we should note that, whereas the narratives about Noah echo (or are echoed in) the polemical sections of other Surahs, in the case of Ṣāliḥ there are in addition occasional verbal links with eschatological material. For instance, in 69.4 Thamūd are said to have denied 'the stunning blow' (*al-qāri'ah*) which was about to befall them, a term which is used three times in 101.1–3 to denote the impending cataclysm.

The Qur'anic Joseph story[24] is a much more elaborate narrative than those about Noah and Ṣāliḥ. It is not a punishment story but an edifying tale. Nevertheless, as is the case with with Noah and Ṣāliḥ, Joseph is depicted as a prototype of Muhammad. At one level, their similarity is fairly obvious: like Joseph, Muhammad was a visionary; like him he was betrayed by his own people and constrained to leave home; like him, with God's aid, he rose to a position of preeminence in another city; like him, too, he was eventually reconciled with those who had plotted against him. In addition we may note two points of detail. First, the reference to Joseph's brothers selling him for 'numbered dirhams' (12.20) seems to reflect Byzantine and Arabic commercial practice in Muhammad's time.[25] Second, like the king of Egypt's premonitory nightmare, which only Joseph could interpret, Muhammad's revelations were dismissed as 'confused dreams' (*adghāthu aḥlām*, 12.44; cf. 21.5). More striking than any of this, however, is the fact that while in prison Joseph is depicted as having delivered a sermon (12.37b–40), which fitted Muhammad's situation rather better than it fitted his own. Joseph had not forsaken the religion of a people who disbelieved in Allah and who denied the hereafter, for his father was a prophet.[26] Nor can the difficulty be avoided by arguing, as many commentators do, that what he had forsaken was the religion of the Egyptians, for no people in antiquity had a firmer belief in the hereafter than they did. Moreover, Joseph is said to have referred to God as 'the

One, the Supreme' (*al-wāḥid al-qahhār*), names which Muhammad was himself instructed to call Him (13.16 and 38.65; cf. 14.48; 39.4; 40.16). Finally, Joseph is alleged to have derided the deities worshipped by his fellow prisoners, in words which the Qur'an elsewhere employs against those worshipped by Muhammad's contemporaries; he said they were

> nothing but names which you and your fathers have given them. Allah has sent down no authority touching them (12.40 = 53.23).

The Meccan material about Moses is more diverse than that about Noah, Ṣāliḥ and Joseph. It includes punishment stories, which emphasize Pharaoh's refusal to believe the message which Moses brought him, and more developed narratives, which incorporate additional episodes from Moses' life.[27] The similarity of Muhammad and Moses is obvious in so far as both men delivered their oppressed people from tyrants who refused to submit to God's will, and both of them subsequently received God-given legislation for their communities. These parallels are strengthened in the Qur'an by the assertion that the scripture vouchsafed to Moses included punishment stories and signs controversies (53.36–54; cf. 20.53–56 and 40.30–31), and by the use of the same stock vocabulary in the Moses narratives and the polemical attacks on Muhammad's adversaries. I do not intend to elaborate on this latter point, as the same phenomenon has been observed already in connection with the parallels between Muhammad and the Qur'anic Noah. Here, I wish simply to draw attention to the intriguing similarities between Moses' prayer and what is said to Muhammad in some of the Messenger sections of the 'Meccan' surahs. In one version of the prayer Moses says:

> My Lord open my breast for me,
> And make my affair easy for me,
> And loose a knot from my tongue
> So that they may understand my speech.
> And grant me, from my family, someone to bear my burden,
> Aaron my brother (20.25–30).

There are several similarities between this and the first part of Surah 94:

> Have we not opened for thee thy breast?
> And removed from thee thy burden
> Which weighed down thy back?
> And exalted for thee thy reputation?
> Lo! Along with difficulty there is ease (94.1–5).

In 20.29, I have translated the word *WaZīR* as 'someone to bear my burden' in order to indicate the link with *WiZR*, 'burden', in 94.2.[28] We may note in passing that there is a celebrated hadīth in which Muhammad is alleged to have said to his cousin 'Alī that he was to him as Aaron was to Moses.[29] Surah 94 says nothing about the loosening of a knot in Muhammad's tongue, but for this detail compare the instructions to Muhammad concerning the recitation of the Qur'an:

> Do not try to hasten it with thy tongue (75.16)

and

> We have made it easy for thy tongue (19.97; 44.58).

So far, we have seen that there is a close relationship between many of the narratives and the Qur'anic polemic, but that in addition the narrative material also occasionally exhibits similarities to eschatological, Messenger or signs sections in other surahs. In the case of the signs sections, the situation is rather more complex. In the analyses of selected surahs, I drew attention to the diverse ways in which the signs sections are related to the eschatological sections. In the signs section of Surah 78, the cosmos is depicted as a temporary edifice, a tent pitched by the Creator, thus preparing the ground for the eschatological prelude in which the tent-pegs are removed and the celestial canopy opens up. In the signs section of Surah 55, the catalogue of God's abundant provision for our needs in this world has its counterpart in the eschatological section, in the description of His even more lavish provision for us in the Hereafter. The signs controversy in Surah 56 points to the transformations observable in nature as evidence that God is able to raise the dead in a new form. In Surah 75, on the other hand, it is the creation of humankind from seminal fluid which is cited as proof of God's power to raise the dead. When the corpus of 'Meccan' surahs is considered as a whole, additional links may be found between the signs sections and practically all the other types of material, as I now hope to show with specific reference to what is said about the celestial bodies and the alternation of day and night.

The signs sections often mention the sun and the moon (7.54; 16.12; 22.18; 41.37; 78.13; 91.1f.), sometimes stressing that God makes them pursue a regular course (13.2; 14.33; 31.29; 35.13; 36.38–40; 55.5), thereby enabling human beings to calculate the passage of time (6.96; 10.5). They also mention the stars (7.54; 16.12; 22.18; 53.49) with which he adorned the nearest heaven (41.12) and which help human beings to navigate (6.97; 16.16). References to day and night are even more

frequent. Here, the stress is on God's causing their regular alternation (7.54; 10.6; 13.3; 14.33; 16.12; 30.23; 31.29; 35.13; 36.37; 41.37; 45.9; 79.29; 91.3f.), which affords human beings opportunities for sleep and for seeking their livelihood (25.47; 78.9–11). There is, in addition, one reference to God's causing the dawn to break (6.96), and several to the sun, moon and stars bowing down before Allah their Creator (22.18; 41.7; 55.6). Not only the heavenly bodies but everything in heaven and earth bows down before Him, either willingly or grudgingly, just as their shadows do in the morning and evening (13.15; 16.48). The Qur'an labours these points in order to transform the consciousness of the pagan Arabs who worshipped the heavenly bodies (41.37), looked upon the night as something to be feared, and thought of the interminable cycle of day and night as detrimental.[30]

References to the heavenly bodies and to the phases of the day and night also abound in the Messenger sections, where they occur in connection with the instructions concerning prayer and Qur'anic recitation:

> Stay up all night except a little,
> half or a trifle less
> or add to it and intone the Qur'an distinctly
> We shall cast a weighty statement on thee.
> The onset of night is more serious for impressions (73.1–5).

> Hymn thy Lord's praise when thou arisest
> And at night glorify Him as the stars fade away (52.48f.).

> ... hymn thy Lord's praise before the sun's rising and setting and at night glorify Him after the prostrations (50.39; 20.130; 11.114).

> Hymn thy Lord's praise from the decline of the sun until twilight and [observe] the recitation of the Qur'an at daybreak ... (17.78).

The transformation of the Arab consciousness thus began with the transformation of Muhammad's life, as he followed these instructions, conformed himself to the natural cycles imposed by the Creator, and received revelations at the onset of night. In so doing he was following the precedent set by previous messengers and prophets, for we learn from the Qur'anic narratives that Moses, David and Zechariah glorified God in the morning and evening (40.55; 38.18; 19.11); and that Abraham would have taken a star, the moon or the sun as his Lord, if he had not observed that they all set (6.74–79).

In view of the instructions to Muhammad which urge him to link his devotions to the diurnal cycle, and which declare the periods immediately

after sunset and just before dawn especially auspicious for revelation and recitation, it is hardly surprising that the heavenly bodies and the phases of the day and night often feature in the Qur'anic oaths:

By the stars when they set! (53.1).

By the sky and the night-star! (86.1).

No, I swear by the positions of the stars (56.75).

No, by the moon!
And the night as it retreats!
And morning when it shines forth! (74.32ff.).

By the sun and its forenoon!
And by the moon when it follows!
And by the day when it reveals its splendour!
And by the night when it veils over it! (91.1–4).

By the night as it veils over!
And the day in full splendour! (92.1f.).

By the morning bright!
And the night when it is still! (93.1f.).[31]

There is, however, another reason for the content of these oaths: the certainty that the regular motion of the heavenly bodies will give way to chaos as described in some of the eschatological preludes

When the sun is extinguished
And when the stars slip out of place (81.1–2; cf. 82.1–2; 77.8–11)

and that the cycle of night and day, far from being interminable, will be brought to an end with the dawning of the Day of Resurrection – 'that day' so frequently mentioned in the eschatological proceedings.

Finally, night and day also feature occasionally in polemical material and in the revelation sections. As regards the former, the Qur'anic polemic likens sleep to death: God gathers our souls at night but resurrects us each morning (6.60; cf. 39.42). The revelation sections, on the other hand, reinforce the positive evaluation of night-time, which we have already observed in the signs sections and Messenger sections; Surah 97 extols the merits of 'the Night of Power' on which the Qur'an was first revealed, and 44.3 refers to it as 'a blessed night'. The Muslims are thus set free from natural fears and called to reverent awe of the Creator.

8

The Interrelation of Structure, Sound and Meaning in Three Meccan Surahs

8.1 Introduction

As a result of my efforts at identifying the principal formal elements in the Meccan revelations, and at demonstrating the various ways in which these elements are combined in individual surahs, the reader should have begun to find the Qur'an more coherent. Nevertheless, in some instances, even though I have succeeded in summarizing the structure of a surah, the surah itself may still seem somewhat disjointed when read in translation. A recitation of the same surah in Arabic, however, is much more likely to seem balanced and harmonious. This is because – as I have occasionally hinted in earlier chapters – structure, sound and meaning are often intimately related.[1] I now wish to explore this issue at greater length, and have purposely chosen surahs whose unity is far from obvious. I propose, in this chapter, to analyse in detail three surahs which Nöldeke ascribed to the first Meccan period.

8.2 The integrity of Surah 103

Surah 103, which is entirely devoted to polemic,[2] comprises three āyahs of unequal length. Although the third āyah has the same rhyme as the others, it is by far the longest. Moreover, the phraseology of this āyah is characteristic of relatively late revelations. For these reasons most European scholars (including Nöldeke, Bell, Blachère, Paret and Neuwirth) think it must have been added later to introduce an exception to the categorical denunciation in v.2.

Here is the whole surah in transliteration, together with a literal translation:

Impersonal oath
1 *wa-'l-ʿaṣr*
By the late afternoon!

Categorical denunciation
2 *innā 'l-insāna la-fī 'l-khusr*
Lo! Humankind is indeed in loss!

Exception clause
3 (*illā 'l-ladhīna āmanū*
Except those who believe,

wa-'amilū 'ṣ-ṣāliḥāti
and do good works,

wa-tawāṣaw bi-'l-ḥaqqi
and encourage one another in truth,

wa-tawāṣaw bi-'ṣ-ṣabr
and encourage one another in endurance.

The noun *'aṢR* is derived from the verb *'aṢaRa*, to press or squeeze, which is used in 12.36 and 49 to denote the action of pressing grapes to make wine. From this verb we also get the non-Qur'anic word *'aṢīR*, 'juice' – so-called because it is extracted by pressing or squeezing fruit. Highly appropriately, the very production of these words requires considerable pressing and squeezing in the throat and mouth. Use your muscles to tighten your throat and squeeze your larynx before pronouncing a short *a*. This will give you *'a*. Now press the tip of your tongue against your lower teeth while squeezing the blade up against the teeth ridge to pronounce the emphatic 'ṣ' – *'aṣ*. Finally, follow this up with a rolled 'r' – *'aṣr*. The precise meaning of *'aṣr* is disputed. In pre-Islamic times, it sometimes meant 'age' or 'destiny', but here it probably has the sense of 'late afternoon'. As that is the time of day when merchants add up their takings, and when Muslims meet for prayer, the message of the surah would thus be quite simple: no matter how great their financial profit, human beings are in danger of eternal loss unless they are believers. Mere belief is not, however, sufficient. What is required is explained in the second half of the third āyah which, phonologically speaking, is squeezed out of the initial oath. The first of the three consonants of *'aṣr* recurs at beginning of *'amilū*; the second recurs no less than six times in the next few words; and the surah ends on the third:

late afternoon
do good works, encourage truth and encourage endurance.

'ṣr
'a *ṣ-ṣ* *ṣ* *ṣ* *ṣ-ṣ* *r*

I have indicated this by printing all three consonants in bold type in the original transliteration. The extreme length of the third āyah is thus entirely explicable, and there is no need to suppose that it was added later.

8.3 The role of word play in Surah 104

Surah 104 is likewise devoted exclusively to polemic. It rhymes in *-ah* throughout, and consists of two subsections: an initial woe and lampoon (vv.1–4), followed by a didactic question and answer (vv.5–9) which take up the word *ḥuṭamah* with which the lampoon ends.[3] Bell thought that this word was not well-understood and that vv.5–9 were therefore added later to explain it.[4] Let us examine the surah in transliteration:

Woe and lampoon
1 *waylul-li-kulli humazati 'l-lumazah*
Woe to every backbiter faultfinder!

2 *al-ladhī jama'a mālan wa-'addada-h*
who gathers his wealth and endlessly counts it out

3 *yaḥsabu anna māla-hū akhlada-h*
He reckons his wealth has rendered him immortal.

4 *kallā la-yumbadhanna*[5] *fi 'l-ḥuṭamah*
Indeed not! He'll be tossed into the Hutamah!

Didactic question and answer
5 *wa-mā adrā-ka mā 'l-ḥuṭamah*
And what will make thee comprehend what the Hutamah is?

6 *nāru 'llāhi 'l-mūqadah*
The fire of Allah kindled

7 *al-latī taṭṭali'u 'ala 'l-af'idah*
which rises above the hearts.

8 *inna-hā 'alay-him mu'ṣadah*
Lo! It is vaulted over them

9 *fi 'amadim*[6] *mumaddadah*
in columns endlessly stretched out.

The two sub-sections, vv.1–4 and vv.5–9, are rhythmically balanced: the first has 46 syllables and the second 45 – which is increased to 46 in continuous recitation of the Qur'an, when the final word is pronounced

mumaddadatim to form a liason with the *bismillah* of the next surah.[7] The opening āyah is very expressive and makes use of onomatopoeia. The shrill note of the initial interjection *wayl* ('Woe!' or 'Alas!') is maintained by the subsequent sixfold repetition of its final consonant *l* in combination with the short vowels *u* and *i*

waylu-l-li ... ulli ... il-lu ...

whereas the mutterings of the critics are echoed in the two terms used to describe them: *HuMaZah* and *LuMaZah*. The former should probably be translated 'backbiter'. It is derived from the verb *HaMaZa* which means to squeeze, pinch or goad.[8] The only other Qur'anic words from this root both occur in Meccan surahs. They are *HaMmāZ* ('habitual backbiter'?), which occurs in 68.11, and *HaMaZāt*, which denotes the 'promptings' or 'goadings' of Satan in 23.97. The other term, *LuMaZah*, may be rendered 'fault-finder' or 'slanderer'. It is derived from the verb *LaMaZa*, which means to make a sign with the eye, with the head, or with the lips in low speech, and thus, by extension, to find fault with or speak evil of.[9] This verb occurs in three late Madīnan passages: in 49.11, where believers are forbidden to find fault with one another; in 9.58, in connection with those who criticized Muhammad over the distribution of charity; and in 9.79, with reference to those who mocked the believers for making voluntary contributions. If the fault-finders who feature in the present surah were also critical of the Islamic commitment to charity, this might explain why they are lampooned for hoarding and counting their wealth.

The word *māl*, in v.2, can denote any kind of wealth, including gold, silver, wheat, barley, clothes, weapons and livestock.[10] The verb *ʿaDdaDa* may be the intensive form of *ʿaDDa*, 'to count', and hence mean 'has counted [it] over and again'. Alternatively, it may be derived from the noun *ʿuDDah*, 'property prepared for casualties of fortune', in which case it would mean 'has laid [it] up in preparation for calamity'. Both ideas are perhaps present.

The third āyah does not pose any problems. The Arabic verb *yaḥsabu* means both 'he thinks' and 'he calculates', like the English 'he reckons'. The irony is patent: Muhammad's materialistic critics, who seek security in their worldly possessions, have failed to take into account the final reckoning, on the basis of which Allah will decide who is worthy of true immortality. This is underscored by the way in which the dipthong *ay* of the initial woe inverts the *ya* of *yaḥsabu*.

The sound patterns of the fourth āyah echo those of both the first and the third. It opens with *kallā la-yu* – 'rather he will ...' – which brings us

back to the *waylu-l-li-kulli* – 'woe to every ...' – with which the surah began. Notice in particular the recurrence of the dipthong *ay*, and of the *k* followed by a short vowel and *ll*, neither of which are found in the intervening āyahs. The word *yumbadhanna* – 'he will certainly be cast' – echoes *yaḥsabu anna* – 'he reckons that' – but reverses the fault-finder's expectations. Finally, *ḥuṭamah* recalls *humazah* and *lumazah*, because it has the same unusual form as them. To achieve the same effect in English one would have to say something like: 'calumniator incriminator' will be tossed into the 'incinerator'. However, this would hardly do justice to the enigma attached to the word *ḤuṬaMah*. From the context, one may guess that it is a synonym either for hell – the view taken by the classical commentators – or for the approaching calamity. But what precisely does it signify? It is presumably linked in some way with the verb *ḤaṬiMa*, which means to break, hence Arberry's translation 'the Crusher', Irving's 'the Bone-Crusher', and Yusuf Ali's 'that which Breaks to Pieces'. Nevertheless the link may not be quite so straightforward. The only other word in the Qur'an derived from this verb is *ḤuṬāM*, which occurs in 39.21; 56.65 and 57.20 in the sense of the withered remains of vegetation, probably thus named because it was so desiccated that it crumbled when touched. That Allah gives the vegetation its luxuriant growth and then reduces it to this fragile (and highly inflammable) state is set forth as a parable of human life – a reminder of the fate in store for all.

The second sub-section opens with the didactic question 'And what will make thee comprehend what the *ḤuṬaMah* is?' If, as seems likely, *ḤuṬaMah* is a neologism, it would have required clarification from the first. Moreover, if I am correct in linking it with *ḤuṬaM* – the vegetation which Allah desiccated by means of the intense heat of the sun – the description of it as 'the fire of Allah kindled' would be entirely appropriate.

The seventh āyah states that the fire 'rises above (or 'penetrates') the hearts'. There is a double irony here: the verb *taṬṭaLiʿu* is a derived form of *ṬaLaʿa*, which is used in the Qurʾan to denote the rising of the sun, and the noun *aF'iDah* is the plural of *Fu'āD*, which signifies the heart as the seat of human ardour, the organ which is kindled with desire.[11] Furthermore, the feminine relative pronoun, *al-latī*, with which the āyah begins, echoes the masculine relative pronoun *al-ladhī*, which occupies the same position in the second āyah.

If the *al-latī* of the seventh āyah takes us back to the *al-ladhī* of the second, the word *ʿalay-him* ('over them') of the eighth takes us back to the first, by echoing both the *ay* of *wayl* and the *hum* of *humaza*. Finally, in

the last āyah, the description of the columns of fire as *mumaddadah* ('endlessly stretched out') parodies that of the fault-finder who gathers his wealth and *ʿaddada-h* ('endlessly counts it out').

Careful attention to the sound pattern thus suggests that the surah, as it stands, is a remarkable unity. I conclude that although it is possible that vv.5–9 were added later, as Bell supposed, they are much more intimately related to the previous āyahs than is generally recognized.

8.4 Structure, sound and meaning in Surah 78

Surah 78 combines the three registers of polemic, signs and eschatology[12] although, for reasons which will emerge in the course of the analysis, I am inclined to classify vv.1–5 and 36–40 as hybrid Messenger/polemical sections. We saw earlier that Bell thought that vv.6–16 and 17–41 were Meccan, but that they were originally unrelated; that vv.17–40 had undergone several revisions; and that vv.1–5 were added as an introduction during the Madīnan period.[13] Before attempting to assess his analysis we must examine the surah in much greater detail. To facilitate the discussion, I shall therefore furnish a transliteration and translation:

Polemic

1 *ʿam-ma yatasāʾalūn*[14]
About what are they questioning one another?

2 *ʿani ʾn-nabaʾi ʾl-ʿaẓīm*[15]
About the tremendous announcement

3 *al-ladhī hum fī-hī mukhtalifūn*
concerning which they disagree.

4 *kallā sa-yaʿlamūn*
No indeed! They shall soon know.

5 *thumma kallā sa-yaʿlamūn*
Again, no indeed! They shall soon know.

Signs

6 *a-lam najʿali ʾl-arḍa mihādā*[16]
Did We not appoint the earth as a place of wide extent?

7 *wa-ʾl-jibāla awtādā*
and the mountains as tent pegs?

8 *wa-khalaqnā-kum azwājā*
And We fashioned you in couples

9 *wa-ja'alnā nawma-kum subātā*
and We appointed your sleep for repose

10 *wa-ja'alnā 'l-layla libāsā*
and We appointed night for raiment

11 *wa-ja'alnā 'n-nahāra ma'āshā*
and We appointed day for livelihood

12 *wa-banaynā fawqa-kum sab'an shidādā*
and We built above you seven firmaments

13 *wa-ja'alnā sirājan wahhājā*
and We appointed a fiercely-burning lamp

14 *wa-anzalnā min al-mu'ṣirāti mā'an thajjājā*
and We sent down from the rain clouds, water pouring forth

15 *li-nukhrija bi-hī ḥabban wa-nabātā*
that We might bring forth seed-produce and plants

16 *wa-jannātin alfāfā*
and luxuriant gardens.

Polemic

17 *inna yawma 'l-faṣli kāna mīqātā*
The Day of Separation is a set time

Eschatology

18 *yawma yunfakhu fī 'ṣ-ṣūri fa-ta'tūna afwājā*
a day when the trumpet will be blown and you will come in droves

19 *wa-futiḥati 's-samā'u fa-kānat abwābā*
and the heavens will be opened and become gates

20 *wa-suyyirati 'l-jibālu fa-kānat sarābā*
and the mountains will be set in motion and become a mirage.

21 *inna jahannama kānat mirṣādā*
Hell is a place of ambush,

22 *li-'ṭ-ṭāghīna ma'ābā*
for the insolent

23 *lābithīna fī-hā aḥqābā*
remaining therein for countless ages.

24 *lā yadhūqūna fī-ha bardan wa-lā sharābā*
They will taste therein neither cool nor drink

25 *illā ḥamīman wa-ghassāqā*
except boiling water and bodily excretions

26 *jazā'an wifāqā*
as a fitting recompense.

27 *inna-hum kānū lā yarjūna ḥisābā*
They were not hoping for a reckoning

28 *wa-kadhdhabū bi-āyāti-nā kidhdhābā*
and they denied our signs with vehement denial.

29 *wa-kulla shay'in aḥṣaynā-hū kitābā*
And yet everything We have numbered in a book,

30 *fa-dhūqū fa-lan nazīda-kum illā 'adhābā*
so taste and We shall never increase you except in punishment.

31 *inna li-'l-muttaqīna mafāzā*
For the godfearing a place of security,

32 *ḥadā'iqa wa-a'nābā*
orchards and vineyards

33 *wa-kawā'iba atrābā*
and full-breasted damsels of the same age

34 *wa-ka'san dihāqā*
and a cup overflowing.

35 *lā yasma'ūna fī-hā laghwan wa-lā kidhdhābā*
They will hear therein neither idle talk nor denial

Polemic

36 *jazā'am*[17] *mir-rabbi-ka 'aṭā'an ḥisābā*
as a recompense from thy Lord, a gift, a reckoning,

37 *rabbi's-samāwāti wa-'l-arḍi wa-mā bayna-huma 'r-raḥmānu*
from the Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything between them, the Most-merciful.

lā yamlikūna min-hu khitābā
They will not have the power to address Him

38 *yawma yaqūmu 'r-rūḥu wa-'l-malā'ikatu ṣaffa-*[18]
on the Day the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks

l-lā yatakallamūna illā man adhina la-hu 'r-raḥmānu
none will speak except him to whom the Most-merciful has given permission,

wa-qāla ṣawābā
and who speaks aright.

39 *dhālika 'l-yawmu 'l-ḥaqqi*
That is the Day of Truth

fa-man shā'a 'ttakhadha ilā rabbi-hi ma'ābā
so he who wills takes unto his Lord resort.

40 *in-nā andharnā-kum 'adhāban qarībay*[19]
We have warned you of punishment nigh

yawma yanẓuru 'l-mar'u mā qaddamat yadā-hu
on the Day when a man will behold what his hands have forwarded

wa-yaqūlu 'l-kāfiru yā-layta-nī kuntu turābā
and the unbeliever will say, 'Would that I were dust!'

The polemical introduction comprises five āyahs, all of which end in *-ūn*, with the exception of v.2 which ends in *-īm*. The listener's attention is drawn to this āyah not only by the break in the rhyme but also by the fact that it begins in the same way as its predecessor. The combined effect of this is to stress the 'tremendous announcement' as the keynote of the surah. Rhythmically, however, it is the third āyah (and not the second) which has the central position. The first word of the surah was probably originally pronounced *'am-mā.*[20] If this very slight emendation is taken into account, there is perfect rhythmic symmetry with the first āyah having the same number of isochronic units[21] as the fifth, and the second āyah having the same number as the fourth:

1. 4 s. + 3 l. = 10 i.u.
2. 6 s. + 1 l. = 8 i.u.
3. 7 s. + 3 l. = 13 i.u.
4. 4 s. + 2 l. = 8 i.u.
5. 6 s. + 2 l. = 10 i.u.

The effect of this is to give emphasis to the third āyah, which also stands out because of its excess length and its central position. This āyah high-

lights the disagreement about the 'announcement'. The existence of a fundamental disagreement which divides people into two opposing camps is taken up in the eschatological diptych, which depicts their contrasting destinies. It is also reflected in the duality which runs through the surah: there is a twice-repeated warning, and the works of the Creator are mentioned in pairs, as are the anticipated events of the Day of Separation.

Another noticeable feature of the introduction is the stress it places on *ʿilm*, 'knowledge'. The three consonants ʿ, *l* and *m*, which are the skeleton of the word, occur in the first āyah, but in the wrong order. In their mutual questioning, the auditors were seeking knowledge, but had not quite found it: the essential elements were there, but they had not assembled them correctly. The second āyah, whose beginning echoes that of the first, mentions the *nabā'* – the 'news', 'tiding' or 'announcement'[22] – from which the surah takes its name. It is an announcement which brings complete and authentic knowledge. Hence the presence at the beginning, middle and end of this āyah of the letters ʿ, *i*, *l* and *m* which spell the word *ʿilm* in full:

ʿani n-nabā'i l-ʿaẓīm

Alas, not all the auditors accept the message. The fourth and fifth āyahs warn that 'they will soon know'. The implication, however, is that this will be at the Judgment, by which time knowledge will be of no avail. The twice-repeated warning *sa-yaʿlamūn* has a doleful quality to it because of the presence of the dipthong *ay*, so characteristic of the Qur'anic *wayl*, ('Woe!'), which occurs no less than ten times in the previous surah (77.15, etc).[23]

With the beginning of the We-you signs controversy, in the sixth āyah, the rhyme in *-ūn/-īm* is abandoned in favour of assonance with *-CāCā*,[24] where *C* stands for consonant. From now until the end of the surah all the āyahs end in this way. Using the first person plural 'We', the Creator turns to address the doubters directly. He lists his works in five pairs: earth and mountains, human couples and sleep, night and day, the seven firmaments and the 'fiercely-burning lamp', rain and the earth's produce ('seed-produce and plants'). Then he concludes the inventory by adding, as a complement to the fifth pair, 'and luxuriant gardens'. As well as the sequential pairing, there is a complex network of inter-relationships produced by the sound patterns. For instance, the final word in v.15, *nabātā* ('plants'), rhymes with the final word in v.9, *subātā* ('for repose'), thus underlining the restful quality of green plant-life, particularly for those who live in daily contact with the harsh realities of the desert. Similarly

the final words in v.13, *wahhājā* ('fiercely-burning'), and v.14, *thajjājā* ('pouring forth'), rhyme with the final word in v.8, *azwājā* ('in couples') – a point the significance of which will be discussed later. There is also alliteration on *j*, *ja* or *jan* running through the whole passage. In addition to the three examples in the three words mentioned above, note *a-lam naj'al* ('did we not appoint') in v.6; *jibāla* ('mountains') in v.7; *ja'alnā* ('we appointed') in vv.9, 10, 11 and 13; *sirājan* ('lamp') in v.13, *li-nukhrija* ('that we might bring forth') in v.15, and finally *jannāt* ('gardens') in v.16. It is as if the previous āyahs were gradually building up to this key word:

j ... j ... j ... ja ... ja ... ja ... jan ... ja ... jannāt![25]
g ... g ... g ... gar ... gar ... gar ... gard ... gar ... gardens!

At one level, the purpose of the signs controversy is obvious: in it, the Creator addresses humankind, urging them to acknowledge that He created the universe with their well-being in mind. It is a small step from this to thinking of the creation as a series of signs pointing to God's power and beneficence. Another way of putting this would be to say that, like the Qur'anic announcement, the book of nature also brings true knowledge, provided that it is heard or read aright. Hence it should comes as no surprise to discover that the letters of the Arabic word *'ilm* recur dispersed through the sixth āyah, the āyah with which this section commences

a-lam naj'ali l-arḍa mihādā.[26]

For a fuller appreciation of the signs controversy, however, it is necessary to recognize that the way in which God describes the creation makes the process resemble the pitching of a bedouin tent. He spread out the earth as a carpeted floor[27] and pegged it in place with the mountains. Above it, instead of the usual double roof, he erected the seven-fold firmament, from which he suspended the sun, figuratively referred to as a lamp. Although the tent-pegs are only mentioned in the seventh āyah, the words *wa-ja'alnā* at the beginning of the ninth, tenth, eleventh and thirteenth capture the sound of them being hammered in. The point of this extended metaphor is that a bedouin tent is a provisional habitation, a temporary residence which can be folded up. So too can the world around us, when the Creator wills.

There is a further aspect of the signs controversy which merits consideration. An Arab poet would frequently begin an ode with a reference to the traces of a recently deserted camp site, abandoned by bedouin who had moved away in search of fresh pastures. He would then lament the departure of his mistress and reminisce about her passionate embrace.

In this way he sought to catch the attention of his hearers before he developed his principal theme.[28] Although the surah is not an ode, and the signs controversy is not an amatory prelude, there are a number of similarities. First, there are the references to the bedouin camp: in this instance a camp which is still standing, but which is about to be struck. Second, there is the sensual imagery. Human beings have been created in couples (v.8) and the night has been appointed for them as a 'garment' (v.10) – a figurative reference to conjugal intimacy.[29] As we have seen, in Arabic 'couples' rhymes with 'fiercely-burning' and 'pouring forth', words with obvious erotic connotations. Moreover the rain is described as *mā'*, a word which in the Qur'an means both 'water' and 'seminal fluid'. It is sent down from the *mu'ṣirāt* – here obviously 'rain clouds', but in other contexts 'pubescent girls'.[30] By means of it, God brings forth 'seed-produce': *ḥabb*, a word which scarcely differs in its pronunciation from *ḥubb*, 'love', and which is derived from the same verbal root. Finally, like an amatory prelude in an ode, the signs controversy serves primarily to capture our attention in preparation for the weightier matters which lie in store.

In the classical ode, the 'amatory preface' or *nasīb* is sometimes followed by a 'disengagement' or *takhalluṣ*, a transitional passage in which the poet moves towards the main subject of his discourse by the device of describing his riding-beast and the arduous journey undertaken to reach his beloved. The nearest the surah comes to this is the eschatological prelude in vv.17–20, with its reference to a series of movements – your coming in droves, the opening of the sky, and the setting in motion of the mountains – which mark the change of scene from this world to the here-after. There are several thematic links with the previous sections. The initial assertion that the Day of Decision has been set (v.17) reinforces the earlier warning that they will soon know (vv.4–5), and gives it substance. The Arabic word for 'in droves', *afwājā* (v.18), closely resembles the word for 'in couples', *azwājā* (v.8), thus underscoring the implicit contrast between the commotion which will be caused by the trumpet-blast and the ordered repose currently enjoyed by the creation. The matter-of-fact description of the sky opening, and the mountains moving, owes its plausibility to the earlier reference to them as tent and tent-pegs. In other ways, however, the prelude points forward. The last two āyahs – vv.19–20 – both have exactly the same syntactic structure. Moreover, they are a rhyming couplet, being the first āyahs in the surah to end in *-ābā*. Together they form a rhythmic arch through which the reader passes to view the ensuing scenes of the hereafter, where this rhyme predominates.

The first panel of the eschatological diptych begins with a statement about *jahannam* (v.21). The initial *ja* of this foreign-sounding word echoes the alliteration running through vv.8–16, but its occurrence here has a shock-effect, because what it denotes is as far-removed from a garden as possible: it is one of the Qur'anic names for hell. The word resembles the Hebrew *gehinnōm* ('Gehenna' in the English Bible) from which it is surely derived, although it probably entered the Arabic language indirectly, via Aramaic or Ethiopic.[31] The Hebrew expression means 'Valley of Hinnom' and referred originally to a valley outside Jerusalem, where children were once burnt in sacrifice (Jeremiah 7.31). In later Jewish and Christian popular belief, it was the site of the last judgment and of punishment in the next life. Interestingly, the Qur'anic description of *jahannam* as 'a place of ambush' seems to presuppose the knowledge that it was a valley.[32] In any case the description is highly suggestive. It encourages you to think of yourself as caught up in the 'droves', which are mentioned in v.18, and impelled forwards into a narrow pass, where you are easy prey to hostile forces. Moreover, the word translated 'place of ambush' (*mirṣādā*) rhymes with that for 'firmaments' (*shidādā*, v.12). Thus, with extraordinary economy of language, the Qur'an makes hell seem more real and permanent than the domed vault of heaven.

In Arabic, 'drink' (*sharābā*, v.24) puns with 'mirage' (*sarābā*, v.20), thereby emphasizing the connection between the first panel of the eschatological diptych and the prelude. Together with the flashback, the two panels of the diptych form an intricate artistic unity. Like the prelude, both are introduced by nominal sentences beginning with *inna* (vv.21 and 31, cf. v.17). Apart from these introductory sentences which function as the structural framework, most of the āyahs rhyme in *-ābā*; the sole exceptions are vv.25–26 and 34, which end in *-āqā*, and which mention the drinks of the inhabitants of hell and paradise respectively. Instead of each statement in the first panel being laboriously contrasted with an exact counterpart in the second panel, there are complex cross-correspondences. Take for instance v.35, 'They will hear therein neither idle talk nor denial'. Syntactically, this is the homologue of v.24, 'They will taste therein neither cool nor drink', but in terms of content it corresponds to v.28, the second āyah of the flashback, which likewise has the rhyme-word *kidhdhābā*, 'denial'.

The next āyah, v.36, has no syntactic homologue, but its first word, *jazā'an* ('as a recompense'), is also the first word of v.26, and its rhyme-word, *hisābā* ('reckoning'), is also the rhyme-word of v.27. Although the

āyah is intimately related to the eschatological diptych, it is clear from the reference to 'thy Lord' that it is a comment addressed to the Messenger. It is therefore best to regard it as marking the beginning of the concluding section. Because this section is dominated by polemic, I have classified it as polemical. However, it ought perhaps, strictly speaking, to be classified as a hybrid Messenger/polemical section. The same is true of vv.1–5 because, despite the absence of second person singular pronouns or pronominal suffixes, the opening question may be construed as addressed to the Messenger. Moreover, these two sections counterbalance one another. Together, they highlight the contrast between the present arrogance of the unbelievers and their future humiliation. Now they question one another (*yatasā'alūn*, v.1) and are twice warned that they will soon know (*kallā sa-ya'lamūn*, vv.3f). On that day, on the contrary, they will not have the power (*lā yamlikūna*, v.37) to address God; in the presence of the angels (*al-malā'ikatu*, v.38), they will not speak (*lā yatakallamūna*, v.38) without prior permission. Whereas vv.37–38 seem to echo the whole of vv.1–5, the summons in v.39 harks back more specifically to the disagreement in v.3, and the reminder in v.40 reiterates the warning in vv.4–5, making it clear that the reason that 'they will soon know' is that each of them 'will see' what his own hands have sent on ahead.[33] Note too that, like the warning, the reminder has a doleful sound, because of the repetition of the dipthong *ay* which is characteristic of the Qur'anic woe, and that it contains the consonants of the key word *'ilm*, 'knowledge'.

In addition to counterbalancing the introductory section neatly, the concluding section serves as a commentary on some of the elements in the central sections of the surah. The pitiful declaration of the unbeliever, 'Would that I were dust (*TuRāBā*)', with which the surah ends, echoes the earlier description of the young women as (*aTRāBā*, v.33), a word which is usually rendered 'of the same age', although it literally means 'of the same dust'. Similarly, the rhyme word *khitābā* ('address'), in v.37, puns on *kidhdhābā* ('denial'), in v.35. According to most commentators, the reference to the Spirit[34] and the ranks of angels resolves the enigma of why the sky will be opened and become doors (v.19): it is so that they may descend. Finally, the description of God as 'the Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything between them' captures the essence of what was said about the creation in the signs controversy and about its impending dissolution in the eschatological prelude, while the title 'the Most-merciful' stresses once again His beneficence and the possibility of still responding to his summons.

We are now in a better position to discuss Bell's analysis. In the first place, it seems clear that vv.6–16 and vv.17–36 are much more closely related than he realized. There seem to be two possibilities: either 1. the signs controversy and the eschatological prelude and diptych were revealed together, or 2. the signs controversy was revealed first, and the eschatological material was revealed soon afterwards, but in connection with it. It is very unlikely that they were once entirely unrelated, as Bell supposed. It is difficult to see why Bell thought v.25 was a later addition but not v.26. Together, they form a rhyming couplet in *-āqā* which contrasts with the rhyme in *-ābā* in vv.22–24 and 27–30. They do not, however, deviate from the standard assonance in *-āCā*. Hence, they may both be original. It is understandable that Bell thought vv.33–34 were an addition, for they seem to break the connection between v.32 and v.35, but the argument is inconclusive because parentheses of this sort are a stylistic feature of the Qur'an. Bell is on slightly better ground with regard to the flashback in vv.27–30. This has obvious links with the polemical material at the beginning and end of the surah, and may therefore have been added later. On the other hand, we should note that the unbelievers are accused of having denied God's signs, which would be highly appropriate if there were a connection between the eschatological section and the signs controversy from the first. Bell's treatment of vv.37–38, 39–40 and 1–5 is needlessly complex. These seven āyahs are related to each other. Thus, if they were subsequently added to the body of the surah, they could all have been added at the same time. We are therefore left with a radically simplified version of Bell's hypothesis: vv.6–16 and vv.17–35 (+/- vv.27–30) may have been revealed first, and vv.1–5 and vv.36–40 (+/- vv.27–30) may have been added later. Such a hypothesis would certainly be viable, but it is quite unneccessary. It rests on the questionable supposition that vv.1–5 must be late because of their rhyme. Yet, as they describe the polemical context which necessitated the rest of the surah, it is much more plausible to think of them as having been revealed first. The bulk of vv.6–35 were probably revealed very shortly afterwards, possibly on the same occasion. Only vv.36–40 stand out as being fairly obviously a later addition.

9

The Integrative Role of Sound and Intertextuality

9.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we explored the relationship of structure, sound and meaning in three 'early Meccan' surahs, and noted that all three were much more coherent than is generally recognized. Two more surahs will be analysed in the present chapter: Surah 79, which Nöldeke ascribed to the first Meccan period, and Surah 17, which he ascribed to the second. Here, too, we shall observe that sound has a unifying effect. In the case of Surah 79, this is principally because words derived from the same verbal root occur in different sections. With Surah 17, on the other hand, it is rhyme which is all-important. It seems to me, however, that what these two surahs have in common (and what distinguishes them from those analysed in the previous chapter) is that they both assume prior knowledge of other versions of the Moses story. Without such knowledge the reader is likely to find them disjointed and verging on the incoherent.

9.2 Surah 79: 'Has the account of Moses reached thee?'

Surah 79 comprises sections devoted to eschatology, polemic, narrative, signs and God's personal communication with the Messenger.[1] Bell considered it a pastiche of unrelated revelations, which the editors had wrongly assembled in their present order.[2] More recently, Pierre Crapon de Caprona has argued that Muhammad himself composed it by combining three distinct oracles.[3] I hope to show that neither Bell's hypothesis nor Caprona's is plausible. Once again, for the benefit of readers who are non-Arabists, I shall begin with a transliteration, together with a tentative translation:

Eschatology

1 *wa-'n-nāzi'āti gharqā*[4]

By those pulling [at the reins] to plunge [into the fray]!

2 *wa-'n-nāshiṭāti nashṭā*
And those moving briskly and energetically!

3 *wa-'s-sābiḥāti sabḥā*
And those swimming along,

4 *fa-'s-sābiqāti sabqā*
then forging ahead,

5 *fa-'l-mudabbirāti amrā*
then regulating the affair!

6 *yawma tarjufu 'r-rājifah*[5]
On the day when what causes a commotion is set in motion

7 *tatba'uhā 'r-rādifah*
and another rides behind it in quick succession.

8 *qulūbun yawma'idhin wājifah*
hearts on that day will be palpitating

9 *abṣāru-hā khāshi'ah*
their looks downcast.

Polemic

10 *yaqūlūna a-in-nā la-mardūdūna fī 'l-ḥāfirah*
They say, 'Will we be restored to our first state

11 *a-idhā kunnā 'iẓāman nakhirah*
when we are decayed bones?'

12 *qālū tilka idhan karratun khāsirah*
They say, 'That is a losing turn!'

13 *fa-innamā hiya zajratun wāḥidah*
Yet there will be only a single cry

14 *fa-idhā hum bi-sāhirah*
and behold they will be wide awake!

Narrative

15 *hal atā-ka ḥadīthu mūsā*[6]
Has the account of Moses reached thee?

16 *idh nādā-hu rabbu-hu bi-l-wādi l-muqaddasi ṭuwā*[7]
when his Lord called to him in the hallowed valley Tuwā.

17 *idhhab ilā fir'awna inna-hu ṭaghā*
'Go to Pharaoh. He has exceeded the bounds,

18 *fa-qul hal la-ka ilā an tazakkā*
so say, 'Is it in thee to purify thyself?

19 *wa-ahdiya-ka ilā rabbi-ka fa-takhshā*
and that I should guide thee to thy Lord and thou shouldest [learn to] dread?'

20 *fa-arā-hu 'l-ayāta 'l-kubrā*
And he caused him to see the greatest sign

21 *fa-kadhdhaba wa-'aṣā*
yet he denied and disobeyed,

22 *thumma adbara yas'ā*
then turned away striving.

23 *fa-hashara fa-nādā*
And he mustered and called

24 *fa-qāla ana rabbu-kumu 'l-a'lā*
and said, 'I am your Lord the Most High.'

25 *fa-akhada-hu 'llāhu nakāla 'l-akhirati wa-'l-ūlā*
So Allah seized him with the punishment of the hereafter and the here-and-now.

26 *inna fī dhālika la-'ibratal*[8] *li-man yakhshā*
In that there is indeed a lesson for him who dreads.

Signs

27 *a-antum ashaddu khalqan ami 's-samā'u banā-hā*[9]
Are you harder to create or the heaven? He built it.

28 *rafa'a samka-hā fa-sawwā-hā*
He raised its roof, then levelled it.

29 *wa-aghṭasha layla-hā wa-akhraja ḍuḥā-hā*
And He made dark its night and brought out its morning bright.

30 *wa-'l-arḍa ba'da dhālika dahā-hā*
And the earth after that, He expanded it.

31 *akhraja min-hā mā'a-hā wa-mar'ā-hā*
Out from it, He brought its water and its pasturage

32 *wa-'l-jibāla arsā-hā*
– and the mountains, He fixed them –

33 *matā'al*[10] *la-kum wa-li-an'āmi-kum*
A provision for you and for your herds.

Eschatology

34 *fa-idhā jā'ati 't-ṭāmmatu 'l-kubrā*[11]
So when the greatest calamity comes

35 *yawma yattadhakkaru 'l-insānu mā sa'ā*
on the day when humankind will remember for what they strove

36 *wa-burrizati 'l-jaḥīmu li-man yarā*
And hell shall be made manifest to him who sees

37 *fa-ammā man ṭaghā*
Then as for him who exceeded the bounds

38 *wa-āthara 'l-ḥayyāta 'd-dunyā*
and preferred the life of this world,

39 *fa-inna 'l-jaḥīma hiya 'l-ma'wā*
Then surely hell, that is the abode.

40 *wa-ammā man khāfa maqāma rabbi-hi wa-nahā 'n-nafsa 'ani 'l-hawā*
And as for him who feared standing before his Lord and restrained/his soul from desire[12]

41 *fa-inna 'l-jannata hiya 'l-ma'wā*
Then surely the garden – that is the abode.

Messenger

42 *yas'alūna-ka 'ani 's-sā'ati ayyāna mursā-hā*[13]
They ask thee about the Hour, 'When is its fixed time?'

43 *fi-ma anta min dhikrā-hā*
What hast thou to do with mentioning it?

44 *ilā rabbi-ka muntahā-hā*
With thy Lord is its final ending.

45 *innamā anta mundhiru man yakhshā-hā*
Thou art only a warner of him who dreads it.

46 *ka-anna-hum yawma yarawna-hā lam yalbathū illā 'ashīyatan aw ḍuḥā-hā*
On the day when they see it, it will be as if they had tarried only a single evening or its morning bright.[14]

On the basis of the formal elements of which the surah is constituted, I have identified six sections. The first and second sections are closely related to each other, as are the fifth and six. In the course of the analysis, we shall also discover links between the third and fourth sections. Thus, we should regard the surah as tripartite:[15]

Part 1: Eschatology + Polemic (vv.1–9 + 10–14)
Part 2: Narrative + Signs (vv.15–26 + 27–33)
Part 3: Eschatology + Messenger (vv.34–41 + 42–46).

Note that Parts 1 and 3 both deal with eschatology, and with questions which the Meccans raised concerning the eschatological teaching. They comprise 9 + 5 and 8 + 5 āyahs respectively, but there is an internal rhyme in v.40 which compensates for the lack of a ninth āyah in the fifth section. In general, the transition from one section to the next is marked by a change in rhyme. This is not the case with the first and second sections, however, because there is a change in rhyme at v.6 but none at v.10. The effect of this is to enhance the acoustic symmetry of Parts 1 and 3, for the former has 5 + 9 rhymes and the latter has 9 + 5. This acoustic mirror-effect is further enhanced by the fact that the last āyah of Part 1 and the first āyah of Part 3 both begin with the words *fa-idhā*, although the meaning is different.

Now that I have clarified the overall structure of the surah, I shall examine the sections in the order in which they occur. The oaths in vv.1–5, with which the initial eschatological section begins, are among the most obscure in the Qur'an, and have given rise to a bewildering variety of interpretations. Their primary function is to add solemnity to the statements which follow them, but I suggest that in addition, in common with some of the other 'rider-oaths', they capture the attention of the audience because of their enigmatic quality. At one level, they seem to describe a battle scene, or more precisely a dawn raid. The words which I have translated 'those pulling', 'those moving briskly' and 'those swimming' are all feminine plural participles. I have assumed that they refer to three groups of horses. The verbal noun *GHaRQan*, which follows the participle in v.1, can mean 'to full stretch'.[16] If that is its meaning here, the āyah may simply refer to horses straining at the reins. In the Qur'an, however, the verb *GHaRaQa* invariably has the sense of 'to drown' or 'to sink'. I therefore tentatively suggest that the āyah refers metaphorically to the horses plunging into the fray.[17] The second āyah is less problematical, for it clearly implies brisk energetic movement. The third āyah extends the initial metaphor, and refers to horses which stretch forth their forelegs

like the arms of swimmers.[18] In the following two āyahs, this group is then described as forging ahead[19] and securing the victory by 'regulating the affair'.

Although the Arab pagans would, I suspect, have interpreted the oaths along the lines which I have suggested, this is not how they are usually understood by Muslims. Some classical commentators recognized the possibility that these āyahs depicted horses in battle, but most championed the view that they referred to angels vehemently pulling out the souls of unbelievers, briskly and smoothly extracting the souls of believers, swimming in space, and forging ahead to carry out God's commands. In support of this they cited Qur'an 19.69, where the verb *NaZa'a* is used of God or His angels dragging the rebellious forth at the resurrection, and Qur'an 10.3; 10.31; 13.2 and 32.5, where God is spoken of as 'regulating the affair'.[20] Another interpretation, which is mentioned by the classical commentators and favoured by some modern authors, is that the oaths refer to three groups of heavenly bodies: those which move in regular orbits; those which move briskly from one constellation to another; and those which swim in space then forge ahead, in order to carry out God's ordinances in a way that affects life on earth. In support of this, they note that Qur'an 21.33 and 36.40 state that the sun and moon 'swim' in their orbits, and that the latter passage also asserts that night does not 'forge ahead' of day. Neither interpretation is preferable to that propounded in the previous paragraph, but both have the merits of alerting us to the fact that some of the vocabulary in vv.1–5 has additional connotations: this is no ordinary dawn raid, but one which has theological and cosmic dimensions.

There is a change of rhyme in v.6. Moreover the imagery in vv.6–7 is more overtly apocalyptic. The verb *taRJuFu* occurs in 73.14, which states that the earth and mountains 'will be set in motion'. The noun *RāJiFah* occurs only here, but it is derived from that verb and is either a collective noun, meaning 'those who set in commotion', or an intensive adjective used as a noun, meaning 'that which causes great commotion'. It is related to *RaJFah*, which is used in the Qur'an to denote a tremor or earthquake sent as a punishment on previous peoples (7.78,91,155; 29.37). The noun *RāDiFah* means 'what rides behind', either literally or in the sense of following closely.[21] It is derived from the verb *RaDiFa*, which is found in 27.72 in connection with the cataclysmic punishment which the unbelievers denied was about to befall them:

Say, 'Perhaps what you are trying to hasten is riding behind you!'

It thus seems clear that, in vv.6–7, the description of the confusion caused in the enemy camp by two waves of invaders is employed as a thinly disguised image for the commotion which will be caused at the eschaton by two successive earthquakes. In the following two āyahs, the extended metaphor of the dawn raid is temporarily suspended, and we are given a description of people's comportment 'on that day' – the Day of Resurrection.

This allusion to the Day of Resurrection is the cue for a brief polemical section in vv.10–14, which mentions the sceptics in Muhammad's audience who questioned his belief that God would raise them from the dead. There is more than a touch of irony in their use of the word *ḤāFiRah* ('first state'), for it is derived from the verb *HaFaRa* ('to dig') and originally meant 'ground dug by a horse's feet'.[22] In the response to their question, the extended metaphor of the dawn raid is resumed: the single cry, which will awaken the dead, is spoken of as if it were the cry of the watchman rousing his sleeping fellow-tribesmen to face an imminent attack.

In the narrative section, which begins in v.15, the rhyme reverts to that of the rider oaths. Moreover, as we shall see later, there is at one point a slight verbal similarity. After a brief introduction, the narrative mentions the call of Moses. In the Arabic, the sounds evoke the situation to which the text refers.[23] The central part of the āyah, with the symmetrical positioning of the letters *bā* and *dāl*,[24] produces a consonantal valley

rabbu-hu bi-l-wādi l-muqaddas.

Across this, there echoes the voice of God in the words for 'called' and 'valley' and in the final syllable of 'Tuwā'

nādā ... wād ... wā

which are born along on a ripple of short vowels

i-u-a-u-u-i-i-u-a-a-i-u.

The effect of this is lost in Caprona's 'restoration' of the surah.[25] In the biblical version of the story, and in several of the Qur'anic versions, the commissioning of Moses is preceded by God's revelation of who He is:

> I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob (Exodus 3.6)

> I am thy Lord (Qur'an 20.12)

I am Allah, the All-mighty, the All-wise (Qur'an 27.9)

I am Allah, the Lord of the worlds (Qur'an 28.30).

This is not mentioned here, but the reader needs to be aware of it to appreciate the irony of the situation when Pharaoh later says:

I am your Lord the Most High! (Qur'an 79.24).

If we note the internal rhyme in v.40, and count the number of rhymes rather than the number of āyahs, this occurs at the numerical centre of the surah. It is also the central āyah of Part 2.

Bell thought that the Moses story was unconnected with what preceded it, and that it had been wrongly placed in this surah by the editors because, quite by chance, it happened to have been recorded on the back of vv.1–14. His judgment was over-hasty: the story is a reminder that God punished Pharaoh in this world and the hereafter, because like the unbelieving Meccans he denied the truth of God's message. In this sense, the connection with vv.1–14 is obvious. I suggest, however, that the audience were intended to make further connections, through their familiarity with more detailed versions of the story: their knowledge, for instance, that Pharaoh rode after[26] the Israelites with his troops[27] and that God punished him by drowning.[28] There is thus an implicit contrast between God's hosts and the hosts of Pharaoh: the former are eager to 'drown' themselves in the fray and will relentlessly pursue their goal, whereas the latter pursued their quarry in vain and were drowned in the Red Sea. The contrast is reinforced by a direct verbal link between the rider oaths and the Moses story: the oaths culminate with God, or rather his agents, 'regulating (*muDaBbiRāt*) the affair' (v.5), whereas Pharaoh is said to have 'turned away (*aDBaRa*) striving' (v.22). We should also note that, like the Meccans, he had been urged to 'purify' himself (v.18),[29] and that the description of him in vv.21–25 resembles the lampoons directed at them in other surahs.[30]

Whereas the narrative section is a cautionary tale concerning the punishment in store for unbelievers, the signs controversy which follows it (the commencement of which is marked by a further change in rhyme) is addressed to them directly. It is a further response to their denial that they will be raised from the dead. Its message is that their creation – and hence by implication their re-creation – is no more difficult than other remarkable tasks which God has performed, the evidence of which is in the world around them. Note especially the reference to His creation of night and morning (v.29), which underscores the earlier allusions to His

impending dawn raid, and to the dawning of the Day of Resurrection. Note, too, the reference to His having fixed the mountains (v.32), which is equally pertinent in view of the fact that at the eschaton these same mountains will be 'set in motion' (73.14; cf. 79.6). In addition, the signs controversy serves to emphasize the irony of Pharaoh's blasphemous claim, because it makes clear that it is not Pharaoh, but the Creator, who is 'the Lord your God'.

A further link between the signs controversy and the preceding Moses narrative is the reference to God's provision of water and pasturage (v.31). In the Qur'an, the verb *Raʿā* ('to pasture') and those of its derivatives which have pastoral connotations are found exclusively in surahs which mention Moses. Surah 87, which begins with a brief signs section that refers to God's bringing forth 'pasturage' (*maRʿā* 87.4; cf. 79.31), ends with the statement that its contents are to be found in the former scriptures, 'the scrolls of Abraham and Moses' (87.18–19). Surah 20 actually depicts Moses as presenting Pharaoh with a signs controversy, in which God says, 'Eat, and pasture (*aRʿaw*) your herds' (20.54). Finally, Surah 28 recounts how Moses met his future bride and watered her animals before the arrival of the 'shepherds' (*Riʿā'*) of Midian (28.23). We should, therefore, probably interpret the signs section in the present surah as a resumé of similar teaching in the Torah of Moses.[31]

The final āyah of the signs section (v.33) ends in *-kum*, a rhyme which is not found elswhere in this surah. Moreover, the āyah seems something of a *non sequitur*, coming as it does after v.32, for the mountains are not a provision for the herds. For these reasons, and because exactly the same words occur in 80.32, where they appear superficially to fit their immediate context somewhat better, several European scholars including Caprona and Neuwirth assume that 70.33 is a later accretion and that it should be deleted. Their arguments are unconvincing. The rhyme scheme of the surah may be summarized as follows:

vv.1–5	a	*-Cā*
vv.6–14	b	*-CāCiCah*
vv.15–26	a	*-Cā*
vv.27–32	c	*-Cāhā*
v.33	@	*-CāCiCum*
vv.34–41	a	*-Cā*
vv.42–46	c	*-Cāhā*

There are three blocks with rhyme a, one with rhyme b, two with rhyme c, and a single anomalous āyah @, arranged in the order abac@ac. The

surah is tripartite, with each part beginning with an a-block. In the first part, this is followed by a b-block, whereas in the second and third parts it is followed by a c-block: ab-ac@-ac. Now v.33 is ambivalent. In terms of content, it belongs with the six āyahs of the c-block which precedes it. Moreover like them, and the āyahs of the other c-block (vv.42–46), it ends with a pronominal suffix – but with *-kum*, 'your', rather than *-hā*, 'its'. On the other hand, in terms of sound it is closer to vv.6–14, the āyahs of the unique b-block, for it has the same assonance as them in the antepenultimate and penultimate syllables, and ends like them with a closed syllable consisting of a consonant followed by a short vowel and a further consonant. In view of this ambivalence, the āyah seems to have an integrative function, linking vv.27–33 with both vv.42–46 and vv.6–14. In addition, it serves to integrate vv.27–33 with vv.15–26, because the repetition of the pronominal suffix *-kum* ('you', 'your'), in 'for *you* and *your* herds', reminds the listener of its previous occurrence in Pharaoh's blasphemous claim, 'I am *your* Lord' (v.24). Moreover, the expression 'your herds' occurs elswhere only in 20.54, where (as we have seen) it is part of a signs controversy which Moses addresses to Pharaoh. The second and third arguments for deleting v.33 are equally unconvincing. The āyah only appears a *non sequitur* if one fails to recognize that the preceding āyah is in parenthesis – a common enough feature of the Qur'anic style – and that it is the water and pasturage of v.31 and not the mountains of v.32 which are described as a provision for the herds. Finally, no weight should be attached to the fact that v.33 is identical to 80.32 – where incidently it is also out of rhyme – because there are many instances of identical āyahs occurring in different surahs.

The next section, vv.34–41, returns to the subject of eschatology. It is therefore, as we saw earlier, the counterpart of vv.1–9. In terms of vocabulary, however, it is closely related to the narrative section, vv.15–26, which has the same rhyme. In the first place, v.34 mentions the coming of 'the greatest calamity', thus harking back to Pharaoh's having been shown 'the greatest sign' in v.20. The similarity of these two āyahs is more striking in Arabic, because the adjective 'greatest' (*KuBRā*) is the rhyme word and is feminine in both instances.[32] Then, in v.35, we are informed that humankind will remember for what they 'strove' (*Sa'ā*). This harks back to v.22, which mentions how Pharaoh turned away 'striving' (*yaS'ā*). Finally, v.37 states that hell is reserved for those who 'exceeded the bounds' (*ṬaGHā*), which was precisely what Pharaoh was accused of doing in v.17.

The surah ends with a brief messenger section, vv.42–46, which is the

counterpart of the polemical section, vv.10–14. Both of these groups of five āyahs deal with objections to the eschatological teaching. They begin with similar-sounding words: *yaQūLūna* ('they say', v.10) and *yaSūLūna* ('they ask', v.42). Moreover, both have the adverb *innamā* ('only', vv.13 and 45) in the penultimate āyah, and both have the third-person masculine pronoun *hum* ('they', vv.14 and 46) as the third syllable in the final āyah. In view of these similarities, it is highly improbable that these two sections originally belonged to two independent oracles, as Caprona alleges.[33]

The assonance of the rhyme-words in vv.42–46 is the same as that in vv.27–32. This terminal assonance, *-Cāhā*, is found elsewhere in the Qur'an only in Surah 91. This tells against Bell's hypothesis, because it would require an extraordinary coincidence for two blocks of āyahs with this rare assonance to have found their way into the same surah simply because the editors found them on the back of scraps used by the scribe who took down vv.34–41.[34] Moreover, there are other reasons for thinking that these two blocks of āyahs are related. First, they both have almost exactly the same aggregate rhythmic mass. This may be seen from the following table:

Block	*Syllables*	*Short Vowels*	*Long Vowels*	*IUs*
vv.27–32	70	50	20	90
vv.42–46	69	49	20	89

Second, they both contain a word derived from the same relatively uncommon verbal root: *aRSā* ('he fixed firmly', v.32) and *muRSā* ('fixed time' or 'anchorage', v.42).[35] Third, they both contain the word *ḌuḤā* ('morning bright' or 'forenoon', vv.29 and 46), of which there are only four other instances in the Qur'an.[36] Finally, these lexical items highlight a thematic connection between the two passages: the God who fixed the mountains in place and created darkness and light has also fixed the 'hour' of the coming judgment which will arrive as surely as day follows night.

In addition to its links with vv.10–14 and vv.27–32, the messenger section also echoes vv.15–26. In Arabic, the word for 'Hour', *Sā'ah* (v.42), calls to mind the description of Pharaoh as 'striving', *yaS'ā* (v.22). The assurance of the Messenger that he is only a warner to 'him who dreads' the Hour (*man yaKHSHā-hā*, v.45), harks back to the occurrence of precisely the same words in the narrative conclusion (v.26) as well as to Moses' use of the same verb (*taKHSHā* v.19) when addressing Pharaoh. As if this were not enough, the words *yawma yarawna-hā* – 'the day when

they see it', v.46 – clearly echo the Arabic word for Pharaoh – *fir'awna*, v.17.

The final āyah, v.46, calls for further comment. It is easily the longest in the surah and has over twice as many isochronic units as each of the three previous āyahs. However, there is no reason to split it as Caprona does. Note that it deals with the problem of the late arrival of 'the Hour' and that it includes the verb *labitha* ('to tarry' or 'to delay'). The excess length therefore has a symbolic function: like the present age, the āyah fails to end at the point the reader expects. Although the expression 'an evening and its morning bright', with which the āyah ends, may appear strange, Caprona's conjectural emendation leads to a semantic impoverishment. The meaning is probably 'an evening and the following early morning', which takes us back to the extended metaphor of the dawn raid with which the surah began. In the Qur'an, the 'evening' (*'ashīyyah*) is almost invariably associated with prayer and worship.[37] It does, however, contain the story of Solomon, a man who loved horses as much as the pagan Arabs did. He inadvertently missed the time of prayer when light-footed horses were paraded before him one evening, but he realized his error when the sun set (38.30–33). The expression for light-footed horses is *aṣ-ṣāfināt* – literally 'those standing on three feet with the toe of one of the hind feet just touching the ground'.[38] As in the rider oaths, there is no noun, only a feminine plural participle.

9.3 Surah 17: The Night Journey

The problems involved in analysing Surah 17 are of a different order. The style is discursive, which makes it more difficult to identify discrete sections devoted to a single major theme. Nor can we use changes in rhyme as a guide to the structure, because all the āyahs apart from the first end in *-ūcā/-īcā*. I tentatively suggest that the surah comprises nine parts, the content of which may be summarized as follows:[39]

I

Liturgical opening
v.1 The night journey; signs

Narrative / Revelation
v.2 The Scripture revealed to Moses
v.3 The offspring of Noah
v.4 The prophecy in the Scripture

v.5 The first destruction
v.6 The second chance
v.7 The second destruction

Eschatology
vv.9–10 Diptych

II

Polemic
v.11 Categorical denunciation
v.12 Night and day are signs
vv.13–14 Warning
vv.15–17 Destruction of generations after Noah

Eschatology
vv.18–21 Diptych

III

Divine law
vv.22–38 The Commandments
vv.39–40 Conclusion: dire warning against polytheism

IV

Messenger
v.41 The Qur'an and their response to it
vv.42–44 Allah alone worthy of praise
vv.45–46 The Qur'an and their response to it

Polemic
vv.47–48 Their response to the Messenger
vv.49–51 Against denial of the resurrection

Eschatology
v.52 Proceedings

V

Exhortation
vv.53 God's servants to avoid discord
vv.54–55 God's knowledge; prophets; David and Psalms

Polemic
vv.56–57 Those invoked fear punishment
v.58 All towns will be destroyed or punished

v.59 Signs would be rejected, witness Thamūd
v.60 The vision and 'the cursed tree'

VI

Narrative
vv.61–65 Adam; Iblis' rebellion and his influence

Polemic
vv.66–70 God alone oversees the journeys of Adam's seed

Eschatology
vv.71–72 Proceedings

VII

Messenger
vv.73–75 Their attempt to make thee compromise
vv.76–77 Their attempt to exile thee
vv.78–80 Instructions on prayer and Qur'anic recitation
v.81 The advent of the Truth
v.82 Dichotomy caused by Qur'an

VIII

Revelation
v.83 Humankind's reaction to God's favour
v.84 Humankind's disposition; God's knowledge
v.85 Question about the Spirit
v.86–87 Messenger's dependence on divine inspiration
v.88 Inimitability of the Qur'an
v.89 God's parables in the Qur'an; humankind's unbelief

Polemic
vv.90–93 Against refusal to believe without miracles
vv.94–96 Against refusal to accept a human messenger

Eschatology
vv.97–98 Proceedings: punishment awaiting the sceptics

IX

Polemic
v.99 signs
v.100 Their niggardliness regarding revelation

Narrative / Revelation
vv.101–103 Moses and Pharaoh
v.104 Settlement in the Land
vv.105–106 Qur'an and Messenger
vv.107–109 Those who accept the Qur'an
v.110 Allah and the Most-merciful

Liturgical conclusion
v.111 Allah's sovereign independence.

Each part ends with a brief eschatological section or with other material which has an eschatological ring to it.[40] Parts I and II end with eschatological diptychs; Parts IV, VI and VIII end with eschatological proceedings; the polemical conclusion to Part III includes a warning that polytheists will be tossed into hell; Part V ends with an allusion to 'the cursed tree' (which is said in 37.62–68; 44.43–46 and 56.51–55 to furnish the inhabitants of hell with sustenance); and Part VII ends by stating that the Qur'an is a mercy and healing for the believers, whereas it only increases the loss of the wrongdoers. The only exception is Part IX, which ends with a liturgical conclusion corresponding to the liturgical opening with which the surah begins.

The sequence of thought is by no means obvious. I do not claim to have solved all the problems, but I shall try to show that the surah as a whole is more coherent than might at first seem. Let us begin with the observation that Part I corresponds to Part IX. Both contain brief narratives about Moses and both are concerned with a revelation. In Part I, however, the revelation is the Scripture given to Moses, whereas in Part II it is the Qur'an. The correspondence is emphasized by the verbal echo of v.5 in v.108. In the former, the punishment of the Children of Israel, which was prophesied in the Scripture, is described as 'a promise fulfilled'; in the latter, the believers say 'Our Lord's promise is fulfilled' when they hear the Qur'an recited.

Bell thought that v.1 stood isolated and had no connection with what followed.[41] In our scheme it is a liturgical opening which corresponds to the liturgical conclusion in v.111. There is, however, more to it than this, for v.1 refers to God's having caused His servant (Muhammad) to travel by night. There are five passages in the Qur'an which mention how previous messengers were made to embark on a night journey. In three of them the messenger is Moses, and the context is the flight from Pharaoh (20.77; 26.52; 44.23). As Moses is mentioned in v.2, we are surely to infer that Muhammad is like him and that his night journey was in some way

analogous to his. After delivering the Children of Israel from Pharaoh, Moses was given the Law, 'the Scripture' which is mentioned in this āyah as forbidding them to rely on other deities. In vv.22–39, Muhammad is given ten commandments which resemble those given to Moses but are more suited to the conditions of seventh-century Arabia. They are framed by categorical prohibitions of polytheism (vv.22 and 39) and followed by a polemic against assigning daughters to Allah. Finally, Muhammad's critics were saying that he was bewitched (v.47), which was precisely what Pharaoh had said about Moses (v.101), and they were trying to scare him out of the land (v.76), just as Pharaoh had tried to scare the believers out in Moses' time (v.103).[42]

Muhammad's night journey was from 'the inviolable place of worship' (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) to 'the far distant place of worship' (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*). We saw in Chapter 2 that the former was almost certainly located in Mecca, but where was the latter? The reference to God's having blessed its surroundings suggests a location in the Promised Land (cf. 21.71, 81; 7.137; 34.18). The tradition which identifies it with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem makes admirable sense in view of the fact that the 'place of worship' (*masjid*) whose destruction is evoked in v.7 is clearly the Temple. The Arabic word *maSJiD*, 'place of worship', literally means a 'place in which one prostrates oneself'. Prostration is next mentioned in the story of Iblis or Satan. God said to the angels, 'Prostrate yourselves (*uSJudū*) before Adam' (v.61). They all complied except Iblis, who objected that Adam was an inferior creature made of clay. He was subsequently given permission to lead human beings astray until the Day of Resurrection, beguiling them with wealth and children (vv.62–64). This episode is proffered as an explanation of the situation in Muhammad's time. Only those on whom knowledge had been divinely bestowed fell down in prostration (*SuJjaDan*) when they heard the Qur'an recited (v.107). The rest rejected the message because (like Adam) Muhammad was a mere mortal (vv.95f.); they greeted the Qur'anic doctrine of divine unity with revulsion (v.46); they called on other deities besides Allah (v.67) and regarded some of the angels as his daughters (v.39); and they denied that they would be raised from the dead (vv.49f., 98). All this, we are to infer, was the work of Satan, who is expressly mentioned as stirring up enmity (v.64) and encouraging profligacy (v.27).

The precise nature of the night journey is not explained in the text. Are we perhaps to identify it with the 'vision' mentioned in v.60? Whether the journey was undertaken in the body or out of the body, it was evidently not something which was witnessed by others; for God had allegedly

shown Muhammad some of His signs (v.1), but the sceptics still required signs of their own. Nor were they satisfied with being told that day and night were two of God's signs (v.12). On the contrary, they demanded miraculous proofs (vv.90–92). These were not forthcoming; God could have furnished them if He had wished, but He abstained from doing so because of the way His signs had been rejected in former times, for instance by Thamūd (v.59). The sceptics should ask the Children of Israel about the signs that Moses performed for Pharaoh, which were also rejected (vv.101–103).

The opening āyah does not state that the night journey included an ascension, but several elements in the surah become more intelligible if we assume that it did. First, there is the reference to God's creation of night and day as two signs:

> so that you may know the number of the years and the reckoning (v.12).

Anyone who claimed to have ascended into heaven would be expected to understand the significance of the mysterious movement of the heavenly bodies. This was the case with Enoch, about whom there is an extensive extra-biblical literature:

> And he was the first among men that are born on earth who learnt writing and knowledge and wisdom and who wrote down the signs of heaven according to the order of their months in a book, that men might know the seasons of the years according to the order of their separate months (Jubilees 4.17).

Then, there is the reference to the seven heavens and to God's throne in vv.42–44. The recurrence in this passage of the word *subhāna* ('Glory be ...'), with which the surah began, encourages us to link it with the earlier reference to the night journey. Finally, we should not overlook the fact that the sceptics were challenging Muhammad to mount up to heaven and prove that he had done so by returning with a scripture which they could read (v.93). Instead, he recited to them the Qur'an, which was revealed to him piecemeal (v.106) and which humankind and jinn would be incapable of imitating even if they cooperated with each other (v.88).

Although I have indicated that the surah does have a structure, and that it gains in coherence once the polemical context is taken into account, the reader may still be mystified by the order of the material. I suggest that what we are presented with is not a neat linear argument but rather a forceful cumulative case which is hammered home by the pounding rhythm and constant rhyme. Furthermore, because of the rhyme, the

surah appears much less amorphous in Arabic than it does in translation. A number of the rhyme words occur more than once:

baṣīrā (vv.17, 30, 96)
wakīlā (vv.2, 54, 65, 68, 86)
kabīrā (vv.4, 9, 31, 43, 60, 87)
rasūlā (vv.15, 93, 94, 95)
madhūrā (vv.18, 39)
tafḍīlā (vv.21, 70)
ghafūrā (vv.25, 44)
sabīlā (vv.32, 42, 48, 72, 84, 110)
mas'ūlā (vv.34, 36)
nufūrā (vv.41, 46)
mashūrā (v.47, 101)
jadīdā (vv.49, 98)
qalīlā (vv.52, 62, 74, 76, 85)
taḥwīlā (vv.56, 77)
naṣīrā (vv.75, 80)
kufūrā (vv.89, 99).

In addition there are three instances of two rhyme words derived from the same verbal root:

SHaKūRā (v.3) *maSHKūRā* (v.19)
KaBīRā (v.4 etc.) and *taKBīRā* (v.111)
NaFīRā (v.6) *NuFūRā* (vv.41, 46).

What is more, consecutive āyahs sometimes have rhyme words which sound almost the same:

maYSūRā (v.28) and *maḤSKūRā* (v.29)
JaDīDā (v.49) and *ḤaDīDā* (v.50)
KHaLīLā (v.73) and *QaLīLā* (v.74).

Finally, many of the rhyme words have the same grammatical form. For instance twenty-two of them are passive participles, no less than sixteen of which are derived from verbs whose third root letter is R:

maF'ūLā (vv.5, 108)
maNSHūRā (v.13)
maDHūRā (vv.18, 39)
maSHKūRā (v.19)
maḤẒūRā (v.20)
maKHDHūLā (v.22)

maYSūRā (v.28)
maḤSūRā (v.29)
maNṢūRā (v.33)
maS'ūLā (vv.34, 36)
maSTūRā (v.45)
maSḤūRā (v.47,101)
maḤDHūRā (v.57)
maSṬūRā (v.58)
maWFūRā (v.63)
maSHHūDā (v.78)
maḤMūDā (v.79)
maTHBūRā (v.102)

All of this helps to integrate what might otherwise seem very disparate material.

10

The Madīnan Surahs

10.1 Introduction

The twenty-four surahs which Nöldeke ascribed to the Madīnan period comprise approximately forty per cent of the Qur'an. They vary considerably in length: Surahs 2–5 and 9 each have between 129 and 286 āyahs; Surahs 8, 22, 24 and 33 have between 64 and 78 āyahs; Surahs 47–49 and 57–66 have between 11 and 40 āyahs; Surah 98 has only 8 āyahs and Surah 110 has only 3. They also begin in a variety of ways: Surahs 57, 59, 61, 62 and 64 have hymnic openings; Surahs 2, 3 and 24 have revelatory openings; Surahs 8, 33, 48, 58, 63, 65, 66 and 110 begin with a direct address to the Messenger; Surahs 9, 47 and 98 begin, on the contrary, with a reference to him; Surahs 5, 49 and 60 begin 'O you who believe'; and Surahs 4 and 22 begin 'O humankind'.

The quantity and variety of the material prevent me from undertaking a detailed analysis of all the Madīnan surahs. I propose, instead, first to offer some brief observations about the extent to which the principal registers encountered in the 'early Meccan' surahs are still present. Then, I shall discuss the refrains which mention the divine names. After these preliminaries, I shall devote the bulk of the chapter to a discussion of the structure and coherence of Surah 2.

10.2 The survival and adaptation of the six principal registers

We saw in Chapters 6 and 7 that the bulk of the material in the 'early Meccan' surahs was spoken in one of six principal registers, depending on whether it comprised God's personal communication with the Messenger or dealt primarily with polemic, eschatology, narrative, the status and authenticity of the revelation, or the signs of God's power and beneficence. In the surahs of Nöldeke's second and third Meccan periods, the same six registers are present, although less space is devoted to eschatology and rather more to narratives and to signs controversies. It is therefore appropriate to enquire to what extent these six registers are also employed in the Madīnan period.

Surah 110, the shortest of the 'Madīnan' surahs, is the only one devoted exclusively to God's personal communication with the Messenger. Most of the other surahs include passages spoken in this register. In addition to being marked by the second person singular personal pronouns and pronominal suffixes ('thou', 'thee' and 'thy'), these passages now sometimes begin with the words 'O Prophet' (8.64, 65, 70; 9.73; 33.1, 45, 50, 59; 60.12; 65.1; 66.1,9) or 'O Messenger' (5.41), formulae of address which are not found in the Meccan surahs.

Polemic against the pagan Arabs and their materialism is, as one might expect, much rarer than it was during the Meccan period. There is, however, a good deal of polemic against the People of the Scripture, and in one relatively brief surah, Surah 98, it predominates. Nevertheless, whereas the context of the Meccan surahs was almost invariably polemical, this is not the case with the Madīnan surahs. Many of the Madīnan revelations were, on the contrary, intended for the edification and guidance of the Islamic community. Thus in place of polemic we frequently encounter exhortatory or legislative material. In no less than eighty-six instances, it is introduced with the words 'O you who believe'.

Eschatology material is still in evidence in the Madīnan surahs, but there has been a subtle shift in emphasis. In keeping with the decline in the importance of polemic, the impending cataclysm is played down and eschatological preludes are entirely absent. Instead, we encounter brief stereotyped references to the rewards in store for the righteous and the punishments awaiting the wicked. The same catch-phrases occur again and again: 'gardens beneath which rivers flow', 'theirs will be a painful punishment', 'therein they will dwell eternally'. In addition to these recurring motifs, which serve to reinforce the ethical teaching addressed to the believing community, we do still occasionally encounter material more akin to that in the 'early Meccan' surahs: proceedings feature in 3.106, 185; 8.36b–37, 50; 9.35; 33.44, 66–68; 57.12–14; 64.9–10 and 66.8; there are diptychs in 4.56–57; 22.19–24 and 47.15; hell is described in 5.37; 66.6, and paradise in 57.21.

In keeping with the decline in the importance of polemic against the Arab pagans and the concomitant absence of eschatological preludes, there is only a single brief allusion to past peoples who were destroyed for rejecting God's messengers (9.70). Instead of the classic Meccan 'punishment stories', which ended in annihilation, we encounter narratives of how in the time of Moses, God repeatedly forgave the Children of Israel after chastizing them (e.g. 2.40–121 *passim*). Muhammad is now clearly portrayed as having a similar function to Moses (2.108; 4.153) and the

same status as Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus and other 'prophets' (2.136; 3.84; 4.163; 33.7). Moreover he is the 'messenger' for whom Abraham prayed (2.129; cf. 2.151; 3.164; 62.2) and whose future coming was announced by Jesus (61.6). Narratives are often introduced very abruptly with the words 'And when' (5.20 and a further twenty-six instances). Other introductory formulae are much rarer. They include 'Hast thou not considered ...?' (2.246,258), 'Recite to them the story of ...' (5.27), 'You have a fine model in ...' (60.4), 'Allah has coined a parable for those who ...' (66.10,11) and 'Has the story not come to them ...?' (9.70).

There are very few passages in the Madīnan surahs which are devoted exclusively to the status and authenticity of the revelation. They include 2.1–2; 24.1 and 4.82. More often, this register occurs in combination with God's personal communication with the Messenger, as for instance at 3.1; 4.82 and 59.21.

Signs sections are equally rare. If we exclude 22.5–6,18,61,63–66, which Nöldeke thought were Meccan revelations incorporated in a predominantly Madīnan surah, we are left with only 2.21–22,28–29,164; 3.190f.; 24.41–46 and 65.12.

10.3 The refrains which mention the divine names

Although, in the Qur'an, God is most frequently called Allah, He is also known by a number of other names, which refer to specific attributes.[1] These names are particularly common in the Madīnan surahs, where many of them occur in steoreotyped refrains at the end of sub-sections. Let us take for example the name *ʿalīm*, 'All-knowing' or 'Knower'. It is used of God some 154 times. In 85 of these, it occurs in combination with another name:

as-samīʿu 'l-ʿalīm, 'the All-hearing, the All-knowing', fifteen times,
samīʿun ʿalīm, 'All-hearing, All-knowing', sixteen times,
samīʿan ʿalīmā (ditto but accusative), once,
al-ʿalīmu 'l-ḥakīm, 'the All-knowing, the All-wise', twice,
al-ʿḥakīmu 'l-ʿalīm, 'the All-wise, the All-knowing', twice,
ʿalīmun ḥakīm, 'All-knowing, All-wise', eight times,
ʿalīman ḥakīmā (ditto but accusative), ten times,
ḥakīmun ʿalīm, 'All-wise, All-knowing', twice,
wāsiʿun ʿalīm, 'Boundless, All-knowing', seven times,

al-ʿazīzu ʾl-ʿalīm, 'the All-mighty, the All-knowing', six times,
al-fattāḥu ʾl-ʿalīm, 'the Greatest Judge, the All-knowing', once,
shākirun ʿalīm, 'Appreciative, All-knowing', once,
shākiran ʿalīmā (ditto but accusative), once,
al-ʿalīmu ʾl-qadīr, 'the All-knowing, the Almighty', twice,
ʿalīmun qadīr, 'All-knowing, All-powerful', once,
ʿalīman qadīrā (ditto but accusative), once,
ʿalīmun ḥalīm, 'All-knowing, All-indulgent', twice,
ʿalīman ḥalīmā (ditto but accusative), once,
al-ʿalīmu ʾl-khabīr, 'the All-knowing, the Totally-aware', once,
ʿalīmun khabīr, 'All-knowing, the Totally-aware', twice,
ʿalīman khabīrā (ditto but accusative), once,
al-khallāqu ʾl-ʿalīm, 'the All-creating, All-knowing', twice.

In the remaining fifty-three instances it is an adjective:

bi-kulli shayʾin ʿalīm, 'Knower of all things', fifteen times,
bi-kulli shayʾin ʿalīma (ditto but accusative), four times,
bi-kulli khalqin ʿalīm, 'Knower of all creation', once,
ʿalīmun bi-ʾl-mufsidīn, 'Knower of the workers of corruption', once,
ʿalīmun bi-ʾl-ẓālamīn, 'Knower of the wrong-doers', four times,
ʿalīmun bi-ʾl-muttaqīn, 'Knower of the godfearing', twice,
ʿalīmun bi-dhāti ʾṣ-ṣudūr, 'Knower of the secret thoughts [men harbour in] their breasts', twelve times.
ʿalīmun bi-mā tafʿalūn, 'Knower of what you do', once,
ʿalīmun bi-mā yafʿalūn, 'Knower of what they do', once,
ʿalīmun bi-mā yasnaʿūn, 'Knower of what they work', once,
ʿalīmun bi-mā yaʿmalūn, 'Knower of what they were doing', once,
ʿalīmun bi-mā kuntum taʿmalūn, 'Knower of what you have been doing', once,
bi-mā taʿmalūn ʿalīm, 'Knower of what you are doing', twice,
bi-kaydi-hinna ʿalīm, 'Knower of their tricks', once,
wa-kafiya bi-ʾllāhi ʿalīmā, 'it suffices Allah to be Knower', once.
bi-hi ʿalīm, 'Knower of it', three times,
bi-hi ʿalīmā (ditto but accusative), once.
bi-him ʿalīmā, 'Knower of them', once,

The full significance of all these variants can only be appreciated by examining them in their Qur'anic contexts, but it is clear that some of them are required by the exigences of rhyme. In over half the instances, *ʿalīm* occurs in the nominative case as the last word in the āyah, where it

punctuates surahs which have the standard rhyme in *-ūn/-īn*. Sometimes, however, it is followed by other expressions which, on the contrary, maintain the standard rhyme: *bi-mā* + plural verb to give *-ūn*, or *bi* + plural participle to give *-īn*. Finally, in surahs which rhyme throughout in *-ā* it occurs in the accusative as *ʿalīmā*.

It would not serve my present purpose to catalogue all the divine names and the expressions in which they occur. I want instead to make a few simple observations which should help to enhance the reader's understanding. Although the precise meaning of some of the names is disputed, the majority of those which occur in rhyme clauses refer to one of seven principal characteristics of God:[2]

1. Omniscience: *ʿalīm*, 'All-knowing' (154); *ḥakīm*, 'All-wise' (93); *kabīr*, 'Totally-aware' (44); *samīʿ*, 'All-hearing' (46); *baṣīr*, 'All-seeing' (42); *shahīd*, 'All-witnessing' (15); etc.
2. Omnipotence: *ʿazīz*, 'All-mighty' (88); *qadīr*, 'All-powerful' (45); etc.
3. Beneficence: *raḥīm*, 'All-merciful' (115); *ra'ūf*, 'All-pitying' (11); *laṭīf*, 'Benevolent' (7); etc.
4. Indulgence: *ghafūr*, 'All-forgiving' (91); *tawwāb*, 'Oft-relenting' (11); *ḥalīm*, 'Indulgent' (11); etc.
5. Uniqueness: *lā ilāha illā huwa*, 'there is no deity but He' (30); *wāḥid*, 'One' (22); etc.
6. Perfection: *ghanī*, 'Self-sufficient' (18); *ḥamīd*, 'Worthy-of-all-praise' (17); *ʿalī*, 'Most-high' (8); etc.
7. Reliability: *walī*, 'Patron' (35); *wakīl*, 'Trustee' (14); etc.

Quite frequently, a divine name is paired with another name which refers to the same characteristic: for example, *al-ʿalīmu 'l-ḥakīm*, 'the All-knowing, the All-wise'. This serves to emphasize the characteristic in question, in this instance divine omniscience. The same name may, however, also occur in combination with a name from a different group: for example *al-ʿazīzu 'l-ʿalīm*, 'the All-mighty, the All-knowing'. In such cases, two different divine characteristics are envisaged.

A rhyme clause which mentions one or more divine names may have a number of functions, most of which are not mutually exclusive. In the first place, as mentioned earlier, the rhyme clause usually marks the ending of a sub-section of a surah. Second, it often serves to reinforce the statement which precedes it by indicating the divine characteristic on which that statement is based. For example, the rhyme clause in 2.20, 'He is in all things All-powerful', reinforces the assertion that, 'If Allah willed,

He could take away their hearing and their sight'. Third, it sometimes safeguards against misunderstanding. For example, the rhyme clause in 2.267, 'Know that Allah is Self-sufficient, Worthy-of-all-praise', is preceded by instructions concerning offerings. It thus safeguards against the possible inference that God has material needs which must be met by his worshippers. Fourth, a recurrent rhyme clause sometimes helps to give cohesion to a major section of a surah. For example, in Surah 2, the rhyme clause 'Allah is All-forgiving, All-merciful' occurs six times (2.173, 182, 192, 199, 218, 226), all of them within vv.153–242, which is the section that lays down regulations for the Islamic community. Fifth, a recurrent rhyme clause may, in other instances, help to give cohesion to a whole surah. In Surah 2, this is the case with the relatively common rhyme clause, 'For He is in all things All-powerful',[3] which occurs six times scattered throughout four of the five major sections (2.20, 106, 109, 148, 259, 283). Finally, the recurrence of a relatively rare rhyme clause usually indicates that two or more non-adjacent sub-sections of a surah are related in some way. I shall argue, in the course of my analysis of Surah 2, that this is the case with the fourfold reference to God as 'the Oft-relenting, the All-merciful' (2.37, 54, 128, 160), names which are paired in only five other Qur'anic āyahs.

10.4 Introduction to Surah 2

Surah 2 is by far the longest of the Madīnan surahs. In the rest of this chapter I hope to guide the reader through it by showing that it has a coherent structure. Before doing this, however, I want to make a number of preliminary observations. In the first place, it is necessary to point out that the surah heading *al-baqarah*, 'The Cow', is not a chapter title. It does not, therefore, indicate the content of the surah. The name is derived from an incident which is mentioned in vv.67–71: the instructions given to the Children of Israel to slaughter a cow.[4] This episode is in no sense pivotal, but because the Arabic word *baqarah*, 'cow', occurs four times in these āyahs and nowhere else in the Qur'an,[5] it was chosen as a convenient label to identify the surah.

A better guide to the content is the reference to the Muslims as a 'middle nation', *ummatan wasaṭan*, which occurs in v.143 at the numerical centre of the surah.[6] The immediate context of this āyah is the change in the direction of prayer, which marked the Muslims off as a separate community distinct from the Jews and Christians. Most of the surah seems to have been revealed early in the Madīnan period, between July

623 and June 624, at a time when relations with the other Peoples of the Scripture were particularly strained. It makes a final appeal to them to join with the Muslims; it depicts Islam as the true religion of Abraham, older than either Judaism or Christianity; and it constitutes the Muslims as a distinct community with their own cultic regulations and legal code.

Although most of the surah is early Madīnan, it probably contains some material which was revealed much later.[7] We need to bear in mind that Muhammad did not have the freedom of a modern author who can bring out successive editions of his work, adding new material at will and altering or deleting passages which no longer seem relevant. The revelations, which he presented to his hearers as the Word of God brought to him piecemeal by the angel Gabriel, were committed to memory by the faithful and recited in the prayers. Although it would have been relatively easy for him to insert fresh material at an appropriate point, it would have been much more difficult for him to make alterations or deletions. Thus it is hardly surprising that the surah contains a number of parentheses in which subsidiary topics are developed at length, or that on occasions successive āyahs appear to contain legislation dating from different periods.

The surah comprises five principal sections.[8] The first section, vv.1–39, which I have called the prologue, mentions the revelation; the dynamics of belief and unbelief; and the story of Adam. Then, beginning at v.40, there is an address to the Children of Israel, which dwells at length on their shortcomings in the time of Moses and in Muhammad's own day. It shows how they perpetuated the sin of Adam and how, like him, they fell prey to the machinations of Satan. This is followed, from v.122 onwards, by a final appeal to the Children of Israel to agree with the Muslims on the basis of the religion of Abraham, which predated the covenant with Moses. The words 'O you who believe, seek help through patience and prayer' in v.153 mark the beginning of the fourth section, which consists mainly of legal provisions for the newly-established community. The fifth and final section, which begins in v.243, also contains some legislation, but the primary emphasis is on striving for Allah with your life and property. The last three āyahs, vv.284–286, draw together a number of themes encountered earlier in the surah, and are best regarded as a brief epilogue. The most plausible explanation of the relationship between the third, fourth and fifth sections is that proposed by Amīn Ahsan Iṣlāḥī.[9] He suggests that when the Qur'an declared the Muslims to be the true followers of Abraham and instructed them to pray facing in the direction of the Abrahamic sanctuary in Mecca, it implied that they should prepare

themselves for the struggle to liberate it from the Meccan idolaters. They were therefore given legislation which would mould them into a community and strengthen their resolve, followed by exhortations and further instructions that were more directly related to *jihād*.

In the rest of this chapter, I propose to examine each of the sections in turn, and to offer suggestions as to why the material occurs in the precise order that it does. In addition, I shall attempt to show how the repetition of stock phrases produces an underlying unity. As an exhaustive treatment of this subject is not possible in the space of a single chapter, I shall deal in depth with vv.1–39 and 243–286, and content myself with a more summary account of the intervening material.

10.5 Surah 2: The prologue (vv.1–39)

The surah opens with a brief revelation passage comprising three detached letters and an affirmation about the Scripture:

> 'L M.
> This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the godfearing (vv.1–2).

A great deal of ink has been spent in discussion of the various detached letters, which are found at the beginning of this and twenty-eight other surahs.[10] If we bear in mind what is said elsewhere in the Qur'an about the passive role of the Messenger's tongue (19.97; 44.58; 75.16), it is hardly surprising that the revelation of whole words and sentences was sometimes preceded by the revelation of some of the consonants of which these words and sentences were composed. In the case of Surah 2, it is noteworthy that *alif* (') is pronounced in the throat, *lām* (*l*) is pronounced in the middle of the mouth, and *mīm* (*m*) is pronounced on the lips – the three principal points at which sounds are articulated. We may further note that these three consonants recur in v.2

> *dhālik 'al-kitābu*[11] *lā rayba fi-hi, hudal li-l-muttaqīn*

and that they continue to play a dominant role in the following āyahs.

Next, attention is drawn to the dynamics of belief and unbelief, which are the two contrasting responses to the Scripture. Belief leads to reward in the hereafter, whereas unbelief leads to punishment (vv.3–7). Some of those who say they believe are in fact unbelievers, as is clear from their duplicity (vv.8–15). Their situation is illustrated with the metaphor of a bad business transaction (v.16), a parable about people deprived of light

from a fire (vv.17–18), and another about people caught in a thunderstorm (vv.19–20). This second parable ends with an assertion that God is All-powerful.

Up to this point, the words are spoken primarily to the Messenger, who is assured that unbelief is part of the divine purpose. There then follows a brief signs controversy addressed to humankind. They are summoned to worship their Creator, whose power and beneficence should be evident to them, and they are urged not to set up rivals to Him (vv.21–22). The link with the preceding material is twofold. First, the address 'O humankind …' (v.21) picks up the earlier reference to those who feign belief: 'Of humankind there are some who say …' (v.8). Second, the enumeration of God's mighty deeds follows on naturally from the assertion of His omnipotence, with which the parable of the thunderstorm ends (v.20). Continuity is also assured by the use of the same key words or words derived from the same verbal roots: 'before you' (v.21), cf. 'before thee' (v.4); 'so that you may be godfearing' (v.21), cf. 'for the godfearing' (v.2); 'has sent down' (v.22), cf. 'has been sent down' (v.4); 'as provision for you' (*RiZQan la-kum*, v.22), cf. 'what We have provided them with' (*mā RaZaQnā-hum*, v.3); 'while you know' (v.22), cf. 'they do not know' (v.13).

The signs controversy is followed by a challenge to those who doubt the authenticity of the revelation: they are urged to attempt to imitate it, by producing a surah like it, and to summon as witnesses those whom they invoke besides Allah (v.23). The challenge is accompanied by a warning of the punishment awaiting them when they fail: the fire that will consume both human beings and 'stones' (v.24) – probably the stone idols which they worshipped. Here, too, we may note verbal echoes of the preceding material: 'If you are in doubt' (v.22), cf. 'This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt' (v.2); 'what We have continually sent down' (*NaZzaLnā*, v.23), cf. 'has sent down' (*aNZaLa*, v.22);[12] 'like it' (*min MiTHLi-hi*, v.23), cf. 'their likeness' or 'their parable' (*MaTHaLa-hum*); 'fire' (v.24, cf. v.17);[13] 'unbelievers' (*KāFiRīn*, v.24, cf. v.19), cf. 'those who disbelieve' (*alladhīna KaFaRū*, v.6), 'fuel' (*WuQūD* v.24), cf. 'kindled' (*istaWQaDa*, v.17); 'humankind' (v.24, cf. v.21).

After the reference to the fire which is prepared for the unbelievers, the Messenger is instructed to inform the faithful of the reward which is in store for them (v.25). The designation of them as 'those who believe and do good works' (*ṢāLiḤāt*) harks back to the earlier description of the unbelievers who deceitfully said 'we believe' (v.8) and alleged that they were 'righteous' (*muṢLiḤūn*, v.11), while the promise of 'fruits' as

'provision' in the hereafter echoes what the signs controversy says about God's generosity to His creatures in this world (v.22).

Next, there is a brief discussion of the contrasting reactions to God's parables, and a statement of His purpose in telling them (vv.26–27). According to tradition, these āyahs were occasioned by the hypocrites' claim that God was too exalted to coin parables like those in vv.17–20. The discussion is replete with references to notions with which the reader is by now familiar: belief, unbelief, guidance (cf. vv.1 and 5) and working corruption (cf. vv.11–12). There is, however, a further development in so far as it is said that God leads some people astray by the parables. Those whom He leads astray are characterized as immoral persons who break His covenant. They are described as 'the losers', thus extending the metaphor of the bad business transaction which we encountered in v.16.

The loss in question is of course eschatological. Hence, the discussion of the parables is followed by a further signs controversy (vv.28–29) which elicits not only the first creation but also the coming resurrection. It ends with an assertion that God is All-knowing.

The final section of the prologue is a narrative about Adam. It comprises five episodes: the angels' reaction when told by God that He was placing a vicegerent on earth (v.30); God's teaching Adam the 'names' (vv.31–33); God's commanding the angels to prostrate themselves in Adam's presence and Iblis' refusal to comply (v.34); God's setting Adam and his spouse in a well-provisioned garden with a warning not to approach a certain tree (v.35); and Satan's causing them to stumble, so that they were expelled despite God's compassion on Adam (vv.36–37). The section ends with a second, more detailed, account of the expulsion, which includes God's promise that those who follow His guidance need not fear, and the warning that those who reject His signs will be the inmates of hell-fire (vv.38–39). This promise and warning are probably 'the words' which Adam received from God (v.37), for it is a common feature of the Qur'anic style for a subject to be introduced briefly and then amplified at a later point.

Although the narrative begins abruptly with the stock formula 'And when' (v.30), there are two obvious links with the preceding section: God's statement of His intention of placing a vicegerent on earth (v.30) follows the reference to His having created everything on earth for human beings (v.29), and the repeated stress on His knowledge (vv.30–33) comes in the wake of the assertion that He is omniscient (v.29). If, as seems likely, 'the names' which He taught Adam (v.31) were the names of

'everything on earth' (v.29), there would be a third link. In addition, there are several verbal echoes of earlier sections of the Prologue: the rhyme word in v.30, *ta'lamūn* ('you know'), is the same as that in v.22; the words 'if you are truthful', which are addressed to the angels in v.31, were addressed to the sceptics in v.23; God's assertion that He knows 'the unseen' (v.33) harks back to the definition of the godfearing as those 'who believe in the unseen' (v.3); the rhyme word *kāfirīn* ('unbelievers') in v.34 is the same as that in vv.19 and 24; and what is said of the inmates of hell-fire in v.39 – that 'they will dwell therein for ever' – was said of the inhabitants of paradise in v.25.

Lastly, in a number of ways the narrative section serves to put the content of the previous twenty-nine āyahs in perspective. It makes clear that it was foreseen that humankind would work corruption on the earth (v.30, cf. vv.11–12, 27); that the unbelief which is now rife began with Iblis or Satan (v.34, cf. vv.6–20, 26), who is humankind's enemy (v.36); that the obligation to use charitably what God has provided (v.3) arises from humankind's status as His vicegerent on earth (v.30); that the provision of material comforts in this world is a temporary measure because of God's compassion on Adam (vv.36–37, cf. v.22), as is the revelation of 'guidance' (v.38, cf. vv.2, 5, 16, 26); and that the gardens, which the believers and their spouses are promised in the hereafter (v.25), represent a return to the blessed state originally enjoyed by Adam and his spouse (v.35).

10.6 Surah 2: Criticism of the Children of Israel (vv.40–121)

In v.40, there is a new development as God turns to address the Children of Israel:

> O Children of Israel, remember My favour which I have shown you, and fulfil My covenant. I shall fulfil your covenant. It is I whom you should revere (v.40).

It soon becomes apparent that those addressed are the Jews and Jewish Christians of Arabia, with whom Muhammad was in contact, and that it is they who were criticized earlier, in vv.8–20, for feigning belief. They are now summoned to fulfil their covenant with God (v.40, cf. v.27), by believing in the Qur'anic revelation which had been sent down to confirm the revelation already in their possession (v.41, cf. v.4). They are further urged not to sell God's signs for a paltry price (v.41) – a resumption of the metaphor of the bad business transaction (cf. vv.16, 27) – and to fear Him

(v.41, cf. 'the godfearing', v.2). Nor should they cloak the truth with falsehood or knowingly conceal the truth (v.42). This is often interpreted as implying that they were deliberately concealing the fact that their own scriptures referred to the coming of Muhammad. From the context, however, it seems more likely that the 'truth' in question is the absolute unity of God. Note that the words 'while you know', with which this āyah ends, occur earlier in connection with the summons to humankind not to set up rivals to Allah (v.22). They are also called on to establish the prayer and pay *zakāt*, or compulsory charity (v.43). This harks back to the definition of the godfearing as those who establish prayer and expend that with which God has provided them (v.3). By implication, the Jews and Christians will not be considered true believers until they fulfil these religious obligations; the mere recitation of their own revealed scripture will not suffice (v.44). The introductory section of the address ends with a renewed summons to remember God's favour to them, and to 'fear' the Day of Judgment, when none will be able to intercede for them (vv.47–48, cf. the earlier instruction to 'fear Me', v.41).

God then reminds them specifically of how He had favoured them in the time of Moses (vv.49–74). Rather than attempting to summarize this highly allusive narrative, which is in places somewhat different from the biblical version, I shall concentrate on its relationship with the preceding material. It now emerges that the covenant referred to earlier (vv.27, 40) had been preceded by a covenant made at Sinai (v.63). God's intention all along was that the Children of Israel should receive 'guidance' (vv.53, 70; cf. 2, 5, 16, 26, 38) and be 'godfearing' (vv.63, 66; cf. 2, 21, 41, 47), but they had been guilty of 'unbelief' (v.61; cf. vv.6, 26, 28, 39), 'immorality' (v.59; cf. v.27), 'working corruption' (v.60; cf. vv.11, 12, 27, 30), and mockery (v.67; cf. v.14f.), and had been reluctant to follow the instructions to sacrifice the cow (vv.67–71). In addition to delivering them from Pharaoh (vv.49–50) and giving Moses the Scripture (v.53), God had generously provided for them (vv.57, 60; cf. vv.3, 22). He had told them to enter a town and eat at ease wherever they wished (v.58), instructions which He had previously given to Adam and his spouse when he set them in the garden (v.35). They should have been content with this, and with the abundant supply of manna, quails and drinking water, just as Adam and his spouse should have been content with what they were provided with. However, in the same way as the latter were drawn to the fruit of the forbidden tree, they had hankered after vegetables, cucumbers, garlic, lentils and onions (v.61). Yet, when they had sinned by worshipping the calf, He had shown Himself to be 'the Oft-relenting, the

All-merciful' (v.54), as He had when Adam and his spouse transgressed (cf. v.37).

In vv.75–121, criticisms addressed to the Children of Israel are interspersed with warnings to Muhammad and the believers not to be duped by them. They are accused among other things of tampering with God's word (vv.75, 79); feigning belief (v.76, cf. v.14); claiming that they had immunity from hellfire (v.80); breaking a covenant to serve God alone, to establish prayer and to pay *zakāt* (v.83); breaking a covenant not to shed their own blood, nor to drive each other out of their homes[14] (vv.84–5, cf. v.30, where the angels express concern that God's vicegerent would shed blood); being 'puffed up with pride' whenever a messenger brought a message which was not to their liking (v.87, cf. v.34, where the same verb *istakbara* is used of Iblis); begrudging the fact that God had sent revelation to Muhammad (vv.90, 105); practising magic which they wrongly ascribed to Solomon (v.102); trying to destroy the faith of the believers (v.109); alleging that only Jews and Christians would enter paradise (v.111); attempting to ruin places of worship (v.114); claiming that God had taken a son (v.116); and trying to convert Muhammad (v.120). The precise setting of these accusations is not always clear, but the general picture is one of intense sectarian rivalry between Jews, Christians and Muslims, with the Jews and Christians vilifying each other (v.113) despite being united in their rejection of Islam. A number of the rhyme clauses encountered in the Prologue recur in these āyahs. They refer, for instance, to God's omnipotence (vv.106, 109, cf. v.20); the reward awaiting the believers (vv.62, 112, cf. v.38) and their eternal blessedness (v.81, cf. v.39); the status of the unbelievers as losers (v.121, cf. v.27); the severe torment in store for them (v.114, cf. v.7) and their eternal damnation (v.82, cf. v.25). In addition, v.80 ends with 'you do not know', as does v.30; vv.89 and 98 end with 'unbelievers', as do vv.19 and 24; vv.94 and 111 end with the words 'if you are truthful', as do vv.23 and 31; and v.101 ends with 'they do not know', as does v.13.

10.7 Surah 2: The Abrahamic legacy (vv.122–152)

The summons to the Children of Israel to remember and respond to Allah's favour is repeated in vv.122–3 (cf. vv.47–48). There follows a tantalizingly brief allusion to the testing of Abraham, which is introduced by the stock narrative formula 'And when' (v.124). At several points there are echoes of the story of Adam, which began with the same formula (cf. v.30): the statement that Abraham's 'Lord' (*rabbu-hu*) tested him with 'words' (*kalimāt*) is reminiscent of the assertion that after his expulsion

from the garden, Adam received 'words' from 'His Lord' (vv.37); God's informing Abraham that He was 'going to place' (*jāʿil*) him as a model for humankind echoes His saying to the angels that He was 'going to place' Adam as a vicegerent on earth (v.30); and God's denial that His covenant extended to 'wrongdoers' (*al-ẓālimīn*) harks back to the warning to Adam and his spouse not to approach the tree or else they would become 'wrongdoers' (v.35, cf. v.95). The impression is thus conveyed that God's dealings with Abraham marked a new beginning in His relationship with humankind.

Next, it is related how God made 'the House' (i.e. the Kaʿbah in Mecca) a sanctuary for humankind and a place of worship, and entrusted its care to Abraham and Ishmael (v.125); how Abraham prayed for the security of the surrounding territory and asked for its faithful inhabitants to receive provision (v.126); and how he and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House and beseeched God to make of their posterity a nation which would be submitted to Him, and to send them a messenger from among themselves (vv.127–9). Like the previous āyah, these episodes echo the story of Adam: for God assures Abraham that He will 'grant enjoyment (*uMaTtiʿu*) a little' even to the unbeliever (v.126), much as He promised 'enjoyment (*MaTāʿ*) for a time' to Satan, Adam and his spouse after expelling them (v.36); and Abraham addresses God as 'the Oft-relenting, the All-merciful' (v.128), a phrase first used to describe Him after He showed Adam compassion (v.37, cf. v.54). In addition, there is more than a hint that Abraham's prayers have been answered in Muhammad's time: for the prayer for God to 'provide' those of the inhabitants who 'believe in Allah and the Last Day' with 'fruits' (v.126) harks back to vv.3, 8 and 22; the prayer for Him to make his posterity a nation 'submitted' to God (*muSLiMah*, v.128) takes up the earlier assertion that anyone who 'submits his face' to God (*aSLaMa wajha-hu*, v.112) would receive his reward; and the prayer for a messenger to teach some of his posterity 'the Scripture' and 'purify them' (*yuZaKkī-him*, v.129) echoes the initial reference to 'the Scripture' (v.2) and the repeated stress on the importance of 'compulsory charity' (*ZaKāt*, vv.43, 83, 110).

There follows the rhetorical question as to who would shrink from joining the religion of Abraham except one who has 'shown himself feeble-minded' (*SaFiHa nafsa-hu*, v.130a). The implication is that Muhammad and his followers are true adherents of the religion of Abraham, and that the Jews and Christians of Arabia are the ones who are 'feeble-minded' despite their counter-claim (cf. *SuFaHāʾu*, v.13). After a reference to the high status conferred on Abraham, and to his voluntary

submission to God (*aSLaMtu*, v.131, cf. vv.112, 128), the narrative about him concludes with the assertion that he enjoined his sons to remain faithful to his religion and to die as 'Muslims' (or 'submitted' *muSLiMūn*), as did Jacob (vv.130b–132). Jacob's dying charge to his sons is then related, along with their avowal that they would worship his God alone – the God of his forefathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac – and that they too were 'Muslims' (v.133). Next, it is made clear that that nation has passed away, that they will be judged on the basis of their deeds, and that Muhammad's contemporaries will be judged on the basis of their own (v.134). To the Jews and Christians who attempt to convert the Muslims, Muhammad is instructed to reply that they follow the religion of Abraham, who was neither a Jew nor a Christian, and that they believe in the revelation sent down to them and in the revelations sent down to the previous prophets including Moses and Jesus (vv.135–140). Then, the earlier statement about the nation that has passed away and about their being judged on the basis of deeds is repeated verbatim (v.141, cf. v.134).

In vv.142–152, the discussion turns to the subject of the *qiblah*, or direction of prayer. The Jews and Christians – now specifically labelled 'feeble-minded' (v.142, cf. v.130) – were criticizing the Muslims for no longer facing in the direction they used to face (v.142). In response, God explains that He has established the Muslims as a 'middle nation' and has implemented the change in order to distinguish those who follow the Messenger from those who turn on their heels (v.143). Muhammad is instructed to pray towards the inviolable place of worship (v.144), and is warned against praying in the same direction as the People of the Scripture (v.145). They recognize it[15] as they recognize their own sons, but a group of them are knowingly concealing the truth (vv.146–7). The believers are exhorted to compete in performing good deeds (v.148) and to pray facing the inviolable place of worship no matter where they are (vv.149–150). They have been sent a messenger from among themselves (v.151) and God assures them that, if they remember Him, He will remember them (v.152). There are a number of important links between these eleven āyahs and the material which precedes them. First, we should note the repeated references to the Messenger's turning his 'face' in prayer (vv.144 *bis*, 149, 150), which are understandable in view of the stress laid earlier on the need to submit one's 'face' to God (cf. v.112). Second, the statement that the believers constitute a 'middle nation' (v.143) harks back to Abraham's prayer for the future 'nation' from among his posterity (cf. v.128), while the detailed account of the role of the Messenger (v.151) leaves us in no doubt that he is the one for whom

Abraham prayed (cf. v.129). Third, it seems clear that the 'inviolable place of worship', towards which Muhammad and the Muslims are instructed to turn in prayer, is none other than 'the House' which Abraham purified and whose foundations he and Ishmael raised (cf. vv.125–127). Fourth, the temptation for Muhammad to pray in the same direction as the People of the Scripture was as serious as Adam's temptation to approach the forbidden tree; for if he had succumbed, he would, like him, have been numbered among the 'wrongdoers' (v.145, cf. v.35). Fifth, in constituting the Muslims as a 'middle nation', God was giving them the same status as that previously enjoyed by the Children of Israel. This is implied by His intimate use of the first person singular 'I' when addressing them; the reference to His 'favour' towards them; and the injunction to 'remember' Him (vv.150–152, cf. vv.47 and 122).

10.8 Surah 2: Legislation for the new nation (vv.153–242)

Now that the Muslims have been constituted a 'middle nation', distinct from the Jews and Christians, they must be given detailed instructions for their guidance. This is the subject of the long address which begins with the words 'O you who believe'.[16] In view of the preceding discussion of the direction of prayer, the address continues appropriately enough with an exhortation to 'seek help through patience and prayer' (v.153), words earlier spoken to the Children of Israel (cf. v.45). The believers are then told to recognize that those killed fighting in Allah's way are in fact alive (v.154), and are warned that they themselves will be 'tested' with fear, hunger and diminution of lives and fruits (v.155a, cf. v.124 which refers to how God 'tested' Abraham). Muhammad is, however, told to give good tidings to the patient, who express their faith in God when misfortune strikes them, and to inform them that their prayers are accepted (vv.155b–157).

The next āyah, v.158, mentions the rites associated with Ṣafā and Marwā that are to be performed on the pilgrimage. The references to 'the House' and 'circumambulation' hark back to the mention of the Abrahamic rites in v.125, but the relationship of v.158 to the five āyahs which precede it and the four which follow it is not immediately obvious. I tentatively suggest that the whole of vv.153–162 was revealed after Muhammad and his followers had performed the lesser pilgrimage unhindered in March 629, but before the conquest of Mecca in January 630; that vv.153–157 were intended to encourage the believers to participate in the latter campaign; that v.158 was necessitated by the doubts

expressed by those who had accompanied Muhammad on the lesser pilgrimage, and who associated Ṣafā and Marwā with pagan practices; and that vv.159–162 were directed at the unbelieving Meccans who had obscured the original Abrahamic faith by placing idols on the two hills in question. Some support for this last point may be found in the fact that the rhyme clause in v.160 – 'the Oft-relenting, the All-merciful' – last occurred in the prayer of Abraham and Ishmael in v.128, immediately after their request to God to show them the pilgrimage ceremonies.

After these allusions to the confusion caused by idolatrous practices, the foundation principle of the Islamic law is stated: exclusive belief in one God (v.163). This is followed by a brief reference to the 'signs' which give a rational basis for this belief (v.164), and then by an explicit polemic against polytheism (vv.165–7).

Because practising polytheism leads people to eat foods offered to idols, the next topic to be dealt with is dietary regulations (vv.168–173). Humankind are exhorted to eat anything lawful and wholesome but not to follow 'Satan' because he is their 'enemy' (v.168). We are thus to infer that eating unlawful food is a continuation of the trend set by Adam and his spouse when 'Satan' became their 'enemy' and persuaded them to eat from the forbidden tree (cf. vv.35–36). In addition to commanding what is evil, Satan orders you 'to say about Allah what you do not know' (v.169). This is probably aimed at the Jews, who invented complex dietary regulations and claimed that they represented God's will. The same words were used in v.80, in response to their boast that they would only be exposed to hellfire for a few days. The following āyah, v.170, which criticizes those who preferred to follow ancestral custom rather than the Qur'anic regulations, seems to be directed at both the polytheists and the Jews. Then, in the little parable in v.171, the unbelievers are likened to animals, because their response to the revelations is no better than that of animals which hear when human beings shout at them but do not understand what is being said; worse than this, they are 'deaf, dumb, blind' – words already used to describe the unbelievers in an earlier parable (cf. v.17). In v.172, the believers are exhorted to eat of the good things with which God has provided them. This āyah includes three motifs with which the reader is by now familiar: God's provision for human needs (cf. vv.22, 25, 35, 56–8, 60); the requirement of gratitude (cf. vv.52, 56, 152); and worship of the One God (cf. vv.21, 40, 163, etc). Finally, v.173 indicates that the only foods that are prohibited are carrion, blood, pork and anything on which invocation has been made to anyone other than Allah.

The discussion of the dietary regulations is followed in vv.174–6 by polemic against the Jews, who hide what God has sent down in the Scripture (cf. vv.42, 146) and sell it for a small price (cf. v.41), thereby purchasing error instead of guidance and torment instead of forgiveness (cf. vv.86, 90, 102). What they are accused of hiding, in this instance, is presumably the fact that God had forbidden no other foods than those mentioned in v.173 (cf. v.169). Appropriately enough, it is therefore said that they will 'eat' fire into their bellies. Earlier, however, they were accused of hiding the fact that the correct direction to face in prayer was towards the inviolable place of worship in Mecca (cf. v.146), an issue about which there was evidently considerable discussion (cf. vv.142–5). The following āyah, v.177, thus reverts to this topic and gives a detailed definition of 'piety' (*birr*) which begins with a denial that it consists in turning one's face to the East and the West. The reason why 'piety' is mentioned at this point is that the Jews were guilty of exhorting others to what they considered to be piety while neglecting what God defined as piety in the Scripture (cf. vv.43–4).

In vv.178f., legislation is laid down for dealing with cases of manslaughter. This seems out of connection with the previous material until one recognizes that the sequence of topics in the address to the believers bears some relation to the sequence in the address to the Children of Israel. The Children of Israel were commanded to revere the One God (cf. v.40), but they fell into idolatry and worshipped the calf (cf. vv.51–54). Their idolatry led them in turn to be discontent with the food with which God provided them (cf. v.61) and to commit manslaughter (cf. v.72).

In the normal course of things men do not experience sudden and violent deaths. The next āyahs therefore stipulate that those who have possessions should make their will known when death approaches (v.180), and warn against altering a person's testament after hearing it (vv.181f.).

The next topic to be dealt with is fasting (vv.183–7). Although fasting brings the believer closer to God in prayer (v.186), it also has the down-to-earth practical function of restraining those human passions which lead to the disrespect for human life and property mentioned above. This point is driven home in the following āyah, v.188, which forbids the believers to 'eat' their wealth by squandering it or to use it to bribe judges so as to 'eat' a portion of other people's wealth.

The fact that the fast lasts a lunar month prompts a question about new moons (v.189). They are for fixing seasons and the pilgrimage. The pre-Islamic superstitious practice of approaching houses through their back doors at the new moon does not constitute 'piety' (cf. v.177).

For the Muslims to be able to perform the pilgrimage in safety, the Ka'bah had to be liberated. To achieve this, fighting would be necessary. The next āyahs, vv.190–195, are therefore concerned with *jihād*, and deal with such matters as whether it may be undertaken during the sacred months, whether it is permissible to fight at the inviolable place of worship itself, and what constitutes reasonable expenditure for the cause.

The discussion turns, in vv.196–203, to the way in which the pilgrimage and lesser pilgrimage should be performed. In the course of the discussion, the comportment of those who use the pilgrimage exclusively for worldly gain (v.200b) is contrasted with that of the true believers who seek gain in this world and the next (vv.201–2). This is followed, in vv.204–7, by a further contrast between those who are hypocritical and those who are sincere. Then, in vv.208–9, the believers are exhorted to enter into peace entirely, and not to slip now that explanations have been given them. In v.210, it is suggested that the waverers were awaiting a theophany to spur them into action. As this was the sin of the Children of Israel in the time of Moses (cf. v.55), the Messenger is commanded, in v.211a, to ask the Children of Israel how many signs they have been given. The reference to the Children of Israel gives rise to the condemnation of those who change God's favour (v.211b), and of the unbelievers who ridicule the believers (v.212), as well as to an explanation of how humankind came to be divided despite God's sending prophets to guide them (v.213). This last āyah has the rhyme clause 'He guides whom He wills to the straight path', which occurs elsewhere only in v.143, where the context is the change in the direction of prayer. The waverers are then asked whether they expected to enter the Garden without experiencing suffering and hardship like that experienced by others in the past (v.214). After this digression, the subject of charitable expenditure is taken up again (v.215, cf. v.195), as is that of fighting (vv.216–18, cf. vv.190–194). Thus the discussion has turned full circle.

Fighting brings with it social problems of various kinds, which are dealt with in vv.219–241. Men who engage in warfare are prone to drink and gamble; hence the question about wine and games of chance (v.219a). Everything one can spare should be spent in God's cause and not on such vices (v.219b). As a result of war, too, children are orphaned; hence the believers are urged to act in their interest (v.220). Because the enemies of the Muslims were idolaters, mixed marriages between Muslims and idolators are naturally forbidden (v.221). The mention of idolatrous women, whom the believers should avoid, leads to the question as to whether even believing women should be avoided during menstruation

(vv.222f.). In times of war, marriages are particularly vulnerable. Instructions are therefore given concerning vows of abstinence (vv.224–6), divorce (vv.227–232), the duty of mothers to breast-feed their children (v.233), the remarriage of widows (vv.234f.), and divorce before a marriage has been consummated (vv.236f.). The next two āyahs – with their exhortation to observe the prayers strictly, including the 'middle prayer' (v.238), to pray while walking or riding if confronted with danger (v.239a), and to remember God 'just as He has taught you what you did not know' (v.239b, cf. v.151) – may appear at first sight to be out of place. The reader should recollect, however, that this section of the surah began in vv.153f. with an exhortation to the believers to 'seek help through patience and prayer', followed by a reference to those killed while fighting. She should also remember that the context of the legislation in vv.219–41 is *jihād*, as indicated at the beginning of this paragraph. Moreover, the reference to the 'middle prayer' occurs appropriately in the midst of legislation concerning women, much as the earlier reference to Muslims as a 'middle nation' (cf. v.136) occurred in the midst of a discussion about the direction of prayer. After this brief parenthesis, the section ends with instructions concerning provision for widows (v.240) and divorcees (v.241), and with a closing formula which refers to God's signs (v.242, cf. vv.187 and 219).

10.9 Surah 2: The struggle to liberate the Ka'bah (vv.243–283)

The narrative introduction 'Hast thou not considered. ...?' (v.243a) marks the onset of a new section. It introduces a brief evocation of a past event: the story of a people who left their homes in their thousands for fear of death, and whom God subsequently caused to die and then brought back to life (v.243b). The narrative concludes with the affirmation that God is full of bounty towards humankind but that most of them are ungrateful (v.243c). There follows a command to fight in the cause of Allah and to know that He is 'All-hearing, All-knowing' (v.244, cf. vv.127, 137, 181, 227), and to give financial support to the cause, thereby lending God a loan which He will repay many times over (v.245a). This injunction is reinforced by the affirmation that God withholds and bestows, and that 'to Him you will be returned' (v.245b).

The event alluded to in v.243b is almost certainly the Exodus, although the details have been modified in order to make the story more relevant to the Muslims. As the Muslims had left Mecca to escape persecution, it is assumed that the Children of Israel, whom Moses led out of Egypt, had

abandoned their homes for similar reasons. The readers are expected to know that after the Exodus, the Children of Israel had to fight in order to conquer the Promised Land, and they are meant to infer that the Muslims must now likewise fight to recapture Mecca and the Ka'bah. There is an added twist to the story, however, because v.243,

> 'they left their homes' (*KHaRaJū min diyāri-him*),

echoes v.85,

> 'you caused a party of you to leave their homes' (*tuKHRiJūna farīqan min-kum min diyāri-him*).

As explained earlier,[17] v.85 refers to the situation immediately before the *hijrah*, when some of the Jews were driven from their homes by Jews from a different tribe. Are we perhaps to infer that some of the former group subsequently threw in their lot with the Muslims? An element in the narrative, which at first seems not to fit the situation of the Muslims (or their Jewish allies) in Muhammad's day, is the reference to the death and revival of the Children of Israel. In order to appreciate the significance of this element, it is necessary to take into account the multiple echoes of earlier sections of the surah which occur in vv.243–5. These echoes establish strong links with vv.16–20, v.28 and vv.55–56. Let us consider the three passages in reverse order. First, vv.55–56 gives the historical context of the death and revival of the Children of Israel: they refused to believe Moses unless they saw God openly, and as a result of their obduracy they were struck dead by a thunderbolt, but then God revived them so that they might be 'grateful'. In their subsequent history, which is narrated in vv.57–123, they proved to be anything but grateful. Hence, v.243 ends appropriately with a reference to God's bounty (cf. v.64), and with the comment, 'But most of humankind are not grateful'. Second, v.28 (which has the same rhyme clause as v.245, 'and to Him you will be returned') gives warning of the death and eschatological revival in store for Muhammad's contemporaries. In their reluctance to fight, the Muslims were refusing to obey Muhammad, just as the Children of Israel had refused to obey Moses. It was unlikely that God would punish them by striking them dead there and then, as He had done with the Children of Israel, but ought they not, nonetheless, to believe and fear Him, because He would one day cause them to die and raise them to life again to face the Judgment? Third, the verbal echoes of vv.16–20 seem to imply that in Muhammad's time those who feigned belief were in fact the Jews of Arabia. The allusion to the Children of Israel's Exodus 'for fear of

death' (v.243) sends us back to the parable which likened those who feigned belief to people caught in a thunderstorm, who put their fingers in their ears 'for fear of death' (v.19). Moreover, the assurance of a generous reward, which is couched in terms of a handsome repayment for those who make God a good loan (v.245), contrasts with the earlier metaphor of the feigned believers' bad business transaction (v.16).

The narrative introduction 'Hast thou not considered. ...?' is repeated in v.246, where it introduces the story of how the Children of Israel asked for a king to lead them in battle, and how when they were given Saul they showed reluctance to fight and questioned his credentials (v.247). They were promised that, as a sign, the Ark would come into their possession (v.248); Saul selected his troops by observing how they drank at a river (v.249); the resultant small detachment prayed for help against the unbelievers and successfully routed the enemy (v.250); then David killed Goliath and God gave him the sovereignty (v.251). The narrative concludes with the observation that if God did not defend some of humankind by means of others the earth would be ruined (v.251).

Some of the incidents mentioned in vv.246–251 are narrated at length in I Samuel 8–17. However, in the Qur'anic version, what matters is not the historical details but the relevance of the narrative to Muhammad's situation. The Qur'anic version differs from the biblical version in four important respects. In the first place, the Qur'an stresses that the Children of Israel said that they would fight for God's cause if they were given a king, but that when they were subsequently called on to fight, most of them refused (v.246). This probably reflects the situation in Yathrib, where there was a widespread recognition of the need for a strong military leader but a general reluctance to do battle with the superior forces of the Meccans. Second, according to the Qur'an, the Children of Israel objected that Saul was not fit to rule over them because he was insufficiently wealthy (v.247). As this objection is not mentioned in the Bible, we should probably infer that it reflects what some of the inhabitants of Yathrib were saying about Muhammad. Third, the Qur'an states that those who objected to Saul ruling them were told that the Ark of the Covenant would come to them as a sign of his sovereignty (v.248), yet according to the biblical account the Philistines returned the Ark to the Children of Israel before Saul was made king (I Samuel 6–7). As the Qur'anic Saul is in some respects a figure for Muhammad, the Ark of the Covenant probably foreshadows the Ka'bah; those who questioned Muhammad's fitness to rule over them would change their minds when, as a result of his leadership, the Ka'bah came into their possession.

Fourth, the Qur'an credits Saul with selecting his troops by observing how they drank at a river (v.249), but according to the Bible it was not Saul but Gideon who administered this test (cf. Judges 7). This episode is probably mentioned in the present context because it reinforces one of the keynotes of the legislative section: the need to be in control of one's appetites in order to be fit to engage in *jihād*.

Before leaving vv.246–251, we should note how the rhyme clauses serve to integrate these āyahs with the rest of the surah. The rhyme clause in v.246, 'Allah knows the wrongdoers', is the same as in v.95 (cf. vv.35, 124, 145 and 193, where 'wrongdoers' is the rhyme word). The rhyme clause in v.247, 'Allah is Extensive All-knowing', is the same as in v.115. The rhyme clause in v.248, 'if you are believers', is the same as in vv.91 and 93 (cf. v.8, where 'believers' is the rhyme word). The rhyme clause in v.249, 'Allah is with the patient', is the same as in v.153. The rhyme word in v.250, 'unbelievers', is the same as in vv.19, 24, 34, 89, 98, and 191. The rhyme clause in v.251, 'Allah is full of bounty for the worlds (*dhū FaḌLin 'alā l-'ālamīn*), is similar to that in vv.47 and 122, 'I have preferred you above the worlds' (*FaḌḍaLtu-kum 'alā l-'ālamīn*; cf. v.131, where 'the worlds' is the rhyme word).

Next, Muhammad is assured that these āyahs are authentic revelations and that he is one of God's envoys (*muRSaLīn* v.252). God favoured some of the messengers (*RuSuL*) more than others (v.253a). If he had wished, their followers would not subsequently have fought each other, but some of them believed while others were unbelievers (v.253b). Those who believe are exhorted to be generous with what God has provided them, before it is too late (v.254, cf. vv.3b and 123). The assertion that there will be no intercession on the Day of Recompense (v.254) furnishes the cue for the celebrated 'throne verse' (v.255) which mentions those who currently intercede with God by his permission. The throne verse also stresses God's omniscience and asserts that His throne 'extends' (*WaSi'a*) over heaven and earth, thus echoing the early reference to Him as 'Extensive (*WāSi'*) All-knowing' (v.247) and safeguarding against the mistaken notion that His presence was localized in the Ark of the Covenant or the Ka'bah. The emphasis on God's sublime nature is followed by the assertion there is no compulsion in religion (v.256) and an attack on idolatry (v.257). These two āyahs are integrated with the rest of the surah by their rhyme clauses: 'Allah is All-hearing, All-knowing' (v.257, cf. vv.181, 224, 227, 244, cf. vv.127 and 137) and 'those are the inmates of the fire, therein they shall remain' (v.258, cf. vv.39, 81, 217).

The narrative introduction 'Hast thou not considered ...?' is repeated

again in v.258 (cf. vv.243 and 246), where it introduces a brief narrative concerning a tyrant who disputed with Abraham and failed to acknowledge that sovereignty had been given him by God. This ties in with the earlier discussion of the God-given sovereignty (*mulk*) of Saul (v.247), from which we inferred that Muhammad's right to rule was being questioned in Yathrib. The tyrant is one of the 'arrogant ones' or false gods (*ṭāghūt*) mentioned in the previous two āyahs as worthless patrons (vv.257f.). The narrative stresses God's power over life and death, thus taking up the Throne verse's description of Him as 'the Living' (v.255) and the reference to the death and revival of the Children of Israel with which the section began (v.243). God's power over life and death is then illustrated with two more brief narratives: the story of a man whom God caused to die for a hundred years (v.259), and the story of how God brought dead birds to life for Abraham (v.260). These three āyahs are integrated with the rest of the surah by the rhyme word 'wrongdoers' (v.258, cf. v.246, etc.), the acknowledgment of God's omniscience (v.259, cf. vv.20, 106, 109 and 148), and the rhyme clause 'Allah is Almighty All-wise' (v.260, cf. vv.20, 106, 109 and 148).

The next thirteen āyahs (vv.261–274) develop the theme of charitable giving, which was mentioned briefly in vv.3, 219, 245 and 254. A notable structural feature of the surah is that the situations of the various types of giver are illustrated at this point with parables (vv.261–265), which counterbalance those told earlier about the people who feigned belief (cf. vv.17–20). The rhyme clause of vv.261 and 268 – 'Allah is Extensive, All-knowing' – is the same as that of vv.115 and 247. The final part of v.262 – 'their reward is with their Lord and no fear shall be upon them, neither shall they sorrow' – is the same as the final part of v.62 (cf. vv.38, 112). The rhyme word of v.263 – 'gracious' – is the same as that of vv.225 and 235. The rhyme word of v.264 – 'unbelievers' – also occurs earlier (v.250, etc.). The rhyme clause in v.265 – 'Allah sees what you do' – is the same as in vv.110, 233 and 237 (cf. v.110). The rhyme clause in v.266 – 'thus Allah explains signs to you that you may reflect' – is the same as in v.219. The statement in v.268 that Satan orders you to behave immorally echoes a similar statement in v.169. The rhyme word 'prudent' in v.269 is the same as that in v.197. The rhyme clause in v.271 – 'Allah is informed concerning what you do' – is the same as in v.234. The rhyme clause in v.273 – 'Allah knows about it' – is the same as in v.215. The discussion of charitable giving ends in v.274 with the assertion that those who spend their wealth night and day publically and privately

will receive their reward from their Lord. No fear shall be on them neither shall they sorrow.

The same was said in v.62 of anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, and in v.112 of anyone who submits his will to Allah and acts kindly. The promise that 'No fear shall be on them neither shall they sorrow' was made by God concerning any who followed His guidance, when He expelled Adam from paradise (v.38).

The theme of charitable giving leads to the consideration of its opposite, the uncharitable practice of usury, which is strictly forbidden (vv.275–281). Usurers are described graphically as 'those who eat interest' (v.275), thus taking up the theme of human greed which runs through the surah, beginning with the sin of Adam and his wife, who approached the forbidden tree despite being set in a garden where they could eat freely (v.35). Those who continue to practise usury 'are the inmates of the fire, therein they shall remain' (v.275, cf. vv.39, 81, 217, 258), whereas those who believe and do good works, keep up prayer and pay *zakāt* 'will receive their reward from their Lord' and so forth (v.277, cf. vv.62, 112, 274). Those 'who believe' are urged to give up any interest still owed to them (v.278); the rider 'if you are [really] believers' probably indicates that the main culprits were the Jews (v.278, cf. vv.91, 93, 248). The next āyah begins 'And if you do not', echoing the earlier warning to the doubters who were challenged to imitate the revelation (v.279, cf. v.24). Those who fail to give up interest must be prepared to face war from God and His Messenger, whereas those who repent will be allowed to recuperate their principal (v.279). In cases where even repayment without interest would cause hardship to the debtors, the lenders are urged to postpone collecting the debt and are informed that to write it off as charity would be 'better for you if you knew' (v.280, cf. v.184). The matter is put in eschatological perspective by reference to the Day when the lenders will be 'returned' to God (v.281, cf. vv.28, 245) and every soul will be 'paid in full' (v.281, cf. v.272) what it 'has earned' (v.281, cf. vv.79, 81, 134, 141, 225) and they will not be wronged.

The prohibition of usury is followed by legislation concerning the recording of debts. When believers incur a debt from one another for a fixed period, they should have a written contract drawn up and witnessed (v.282). If they are on a journey, however, and no one can be found to write a contract, a pledge may be deposited as a caution (v.283). In these two āyahs the verb *KaTaBa*, 'to write', occurs no less than four times, as does the noun *KāTiB*, 'a scribe'. Both words are related to *KiTāB*,

'Scripture', and it is striking that what is said here about the use of writing for commercial purposes, and the heavy responsibility shouldered by those who are able to write, is reminiscent of what was said earlier in connection with Scripture. The surah opened with a reference to the 'Scripture' in which there is 'no doubt', which is a guidance for 'the god-fearing' (v.2); and those who were 'in doubt' about it were subsequently challenged to bring a surah like it and 'call upon' their 'witnesses' (v.23). Now, it is stated that the practice of writing a contract and having it witnessed reduces chances of 'doubt', that those who are 'called upon' to act as 'witnesses' should not refuse, and that a scribe or a person who is given a pledge should 'fear Allah'. Earlier, it was mentioned that some objected to being told to believe, on the grounds that belief was only for the 'feeble-minded' (v.13), and it was said of them (figuratively speaking) that their 'trading' did not profit them (v.16). Now, arrangements are made for a guardian to dictate a contract when a borrower is literally 'feeble-minded' or otherwise incapacitated, and for contracts to be witnessed except in transactions which involve 'trading' on the spot. Earlier, the Jews were accused of falsifying the Scripture entrusted to them by 'concealing the truth' (vv.42, 146, cf. vv.159, 174), altering God's statement (v.59), tampering with God's word (v.75), or presenting what they themselves had written as coming from God (v.79). Now, those who act as scribes are solemnly charged not to omit any part of a contract that is dictated to them, and those who receive pledges are warned against 'concealing' testimony. Earlier, those who feigned belief were said to have diseased hearts (v.10), and the Children of Israel's hearts were said to have become harder than stone (v.74), they boasted that their hearts were uncircumcised (v.88), and they were made to drink the calf into their hearts because of their unbelief (v.93). Now, anyone who conceals his testimony is said to have a guilty heart.

10.10 Surah 2: The epilogue (vv.284–286)

The last three āyahs constitute a brief epilogue which draws the previous material together. The first of these āyahs begins with the assertion:

> To Allah belongs everything in the heavens and the earth (v.284a).

With this we may compare similar assertions made in the course of the section devoted to criticism of the Children of Israel (vv.107, 116), and in the celebrated throne verse (v.255); the references to the creation of the heavens and the earth (vv.29, 117, 164); and God's reminder to the angels

that He knew the unseen in the heavens and the earth (v.33). Next it is asserted that:

> Whether you disclose what is in your souls or conceal it,
> Allah will bring you to account for it (v.284b).

This harks back to when God informed the angels that He knew what they disclosed and what they were hiding (v.33); to when He claimed that He knew what the Children of Israel kept secret and what they announced (v.77); and to when He advised the believers that it was better to conceal acts of charity than to disclose them (v.271). The āyah ends by stating that God forgives and punishes whom He wills (v.284c) and that He is omnipotent (v.284d, cf. vv.20, 106, 109, 148, 259).

The second āyah of the epilogue begins with the assertion that the Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the believers (v.285a). This echoes the prologue, which defines the godfearing as those who

> believe in what has been sent down to thee and in what was sent down before thee (v.4).

The believers are further said to believe in God, His Scriptures and His messengers (v.285b). This statement resembles the earlier definition of piety as belief in God, the last Day, the angels and the Scripture (v.177). The centrality of belief in God has frequently been stressed, notably in the summons to worship the Creator (vv.21–22), in the reference to the covenant with the Children of Israel (v.83), at the beginning of the section dealing with legislation (v.163), and in the throne verse (v.255). 'Scriptures' in the plural have not been mentioned before, but the surah begins with a reference to the revelation as 'the Scripture' (v.2), Moses is said to have been given 'the Scripture' (vv.53, 87), and the Jews and Christians are referred to as 'the People of the Scripture' (vv.105, 109, cf. 101, 113, 121, 144, 145, 146). There are several allusions to 'angels' (vv.30, 31, 34, 98, 161, 177, 210, 248) and to messengers who preceded Muhammad (vv.101, 214). The next clause of the second āyah asserts that the believers do not make a distinction between the messengers (v.285c). This harks back to the earlier assertion that they do not make a distinction between Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes, Moses and Jesus (v.136). It has to be read in the light of the assurance to Muhammad that he was one of the envoys (v.252), and the acknowledgment that God has favoured some of the messengers more than others (v.253). The second āyah ends with the believers' confession:

They say, 'We hear and we obey. [Grant us] Thy forgiveness, Our Lord; unto Thee is the homecoming' (v.285d).

Their words contrast with those of the Children of Israel in Moses' time, who said, 'We hear and we disobey' (v.93) when God made a covenant with them, and who corrupted the penitential ritual when God offered them forgiveness (v.58). The believers' petition for forgiveness echoes the repeated reference to Allah as the All-forgiving (vv.173, 182, 192, 199, 218, 225, 226, 235). The final part of their confession contrasts with the description of hellfire as a wretched 'homecoming' (v.126).

The third āyah of the epilogue, and thus the last in the surah, begins with the assertion that God does not charge a soul beyond its capacity (v.286a), an assertion which was made earlier in the context of the duty of a man to provide for the mother of his children while she is breast-feeding (v.233). This is followed by a statement to the effect that each soul is credited with what it has earned and debited with what it has brought on itself (v.286b), which is in line with earlier references to individual responsibility and requital on the Day of Recompense (vv.79, 134, 141, 202, 225, 281). Lastly, there is a prayer for leniency, forgiveness and protection (v.286c). This includes a request to God not to take us to task if we forget – a reminder of the criticism of the Children of Israel for enjoining piety on others while forgetting it themselves (v.44), and of the warning to the believers not to forget to be generous towards one another (v.237). It also includes a request to Him not to 'charge us with a load like that which those before us were charged with'. This is probably a reference to the legal obligations imposed on the Children of Israel (cf. 7.157). On the other hand, the context of the further request to Him not to 'burden us with what we do not have the strength to bear' is more likely the enjoining of *jihād*, for the phrase 'we do not have the strength' (*lā ṭāqah la-nā*) occurred earlier on the lips of the Children of Israel who had been chosen to fight Goliath and his troops (v.249). Moreover, the final words of the prayer – 'Help us against the people of the unbelievers' – were also uttered by the Children of Israel on the same occasion (cf. v.250).

11

The Dynamics of the Qur'anic Discourse

11.1 Introduction

A prolonged piece of verbal communication normally involves a speaker, who employs the first-person singular personal pronouns 'I/me', and an addressee or addressees, who are designated by the second-person personal pronoun 'you'. Reference may also be made to third parties, who are designated by the third-person personal pronouns 'he/him', 'she/her' or 'they/them'. In practice, verbal communication is often more complex than this. For instance, the author of a learned book may occasionally use the first-person plural personal pronouns 'we/us' as a self-designation and state that '*we* are of the opinion', even though he is putting forward a point of view which is not shared by anyone else. He may also, from time to time, refer to himself in the third person and claim that '*the author* has carried out a thorough examination of all the extant manuscripts and *he* is now convinced that ...', where what he means is, '*I* have carried out a thorough examination of all the extant manuscripts and *I* am now convinced that ...'. Finally, because it is considered bad form in academic prose to address the reader repeatedly as 'you', there is a tendency to write, '*the reader* should now be in a position to make up *his* or *her* own mind', rather than, '*you* should now be in a position to make up *your* own mind'.

The above brief remarks are intended to prepare the way for a detailed examination of the Qur'anic discourse, which is highly unusual in a number of respects. According to orthodox understanding, the whole of the Qur'an is the word of God which was brought to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel piecemeal over a period of twenty-three years. There is thus, for Muslims, no doubt that the speaker is God. However, He generally designates himself either as 'He'[1] or as 'We', and only occasionally as 'I'. Moreover, at times He addresses a privileged individual (Muhammad) as 'thou',[2] and refers to the wider audience as 'they/them', whereas at others He addresses the wider audience as 'you' and refers to the privileged individual as 'he/him'. European readers of the Qur'an are likely to find this disorientating for at least three reasons. First, they will

be puzzled by God's repeated reference to Himself as 'He'. W. M. Watt remarks:

> It is no doubt allowable for a speaker to refer to himself in the third person occasionally, but the extent to which we find the Prophet apparently being addressed and told about God as a third person, is unusual.[3]

Second, largely because of this difficulty, they may be tempted to infer that although the first person plural, 'we', is sometimes used as a self-designation by God, its presence more frequently indicates that the speaker is the revelatory angels. Watt concedes that it is not always easy to distinguish between the two, but argues that:

> In the later portions of the Qur'an, it seems to be an almost invariable rule that the words are addressed by the angels, or by Gabriel using the plural 'we', to the Prophet.[4]

Third, they will, as like as not, be exasperated by the frequency with which the speaker shifts to and fro between 'We' and 'I', and put this down to the incompetence of Muhammad or subsequent editors. When discussing the structure of the surahs in the previous four chapters, I skirted round these difficulties. It is now time to tackle them directly. It will be argued that, although highly unusual, the Qur'anic use of personal pronouns is both consistent and effective.

11.2 The implied speaker as both 'We' and 'He'

It is not my purpose here to discuss whether the Qur'an is genuinely the Word of God, or whether it is angelic speech, or whether it is Muhammad's own teaching artfully presented as revelation. I am more concerned to analyse the Qur'anic discourse in a way which will, as far as it goes, be acceptable to believers and unbelievers alike. For this reason, I shall refer to the 'implied speaker', and refrain from discussing whether the 'implied speaker' and the actual speaker are identical.

If, then, the Qur'an is approached without any presuppositions about its origins or authorship, who is its implied speaker? I propose to begin to tackle this question by examining the We-thou discourse in three surahs. The first of these is Surah 94, a 'Messenger' surah which Nöldeke ascribed to the first Meccan period. In this surah, the We-thou discourse is concentrated in the first part of the solace:

> Have We not opened for thee thy breast?
> And removed from thee thy burden
> Which weighed down thy back?
> And exalted for thee thy reputation? (94.1–4).

There is, however, in addition, a single reference to 'thy Lord' in v.6, which is part of the concluding directive. If the surah is read in isolation, it is impossible to tell whether the implied speaker is God or the angels, but the balance of probability might seem in favour of the latter, because it would be more natural for the revelatory angels to refer to God as 'thy Lord', than for God Himself to do so. If, however, we compare vv.1–4 with the rest of the Qur'an, we discover that the opening of breasts, the removal of burdens and the exalting of messengers are actions which are elsewhere ascribed to God:

> Whomsoever Allah wishes to guide, He opens his breast to Islam (6.125).

> [Moses said] 'My Lord ... grant me, from my family, someone to bear my burden ...' (20.29).

> Some [of the messengers] He exalted in rank (2.253).

It therefore seems likely that in Surah 94 'We' is a divine self-designation.

My second example is Surah 12, which Nöldeke ascribed to the third Meccan period. As mentioned in Chapter 7, it is one of eight tripartite surahs whose first and third parts are primarily attestations of the surah's revealed status and whose second part is narrative. The We–thou discourse is concentrated in the first and third parts (vv.1–3 and vv.102–111) and in a handful of the narrator's comments on the story (vv.15, 21, 22, 24, 56, 76). As was the case with Surah 94, most of the actions ascribed to the speaker are elsewhere ascribed to God. The data may be summarized as follows:

> Surely We have sent it down an Arabic Qur'an ... (12.2)
> Allah has sent down the Scripture and Wisdom ... (4.113)

> We narrate to thee the best of narratives ... (12.3)
> He narrates the truth ... (6.57)

> We have revealed to thee this Qur'an ... (12.3, cf. 15.102)
> That is some of the wisdom thy Lord has revealed to thee ... (17.39)

> Thus did We establish Joseph in the land ... (12.21, cf. 56)

He said, 'Whatever my Lord has established me to do ...' (18.95)

... that We might teach him the interpretation of sayings ... (12.21)
'My Lord, Thou hast taught me the interpretation of sayings ...' (12.101)

We gave him wisdom and knowledge ... (12.22)
Allah gave him kingship and wisdom ... (2.251)

... thus do We reward those who do good ... (12.22)
He rewards those who have done good ... (53.31)

... thus it was that We might turn away from him evil and indecency (12.24)
He turns it away from whomsoever He wishes (24.43)

... surely he was one of Our sincere servants (12.24)
Serve Allah sincerely ... (39.2)

We strike with Our mercy whomsoever We please ... (12.56)
When He strikes with it any of His servants ... (30.48)
But for Allah's bounty and His mercy ... (2.64)

We do not waste the reward of those who do good ... (12.56)
Allah does not waste the reward of those who do good (12.90)

Thus We contrived for Joseph ... (12.76)
I too am contriving a plot ... (86.16)

We exalt in rank whomsoever We please ... (12.76)
Some [of the messengers] He exalted in rank ... (2.253)

And We have not sent before thee but men from the people of the towns ... (12.109)
He it is who has sent His messenger with guidance ... (9.33)

Our help came to them ... (12.110)
Help comes only from Allah ... (3.126)

Our severity is not averted from the guilty people (12.110).
His severity is not averted from the guilty people (7.147).

Despite these striking parallels, the sceptic may still wish to argue that 'We' is the self-designation of the angels, and that they are able to speak as they do because they are God's agents, who carry out actions of which He is the ultimate author. Note, however, that although the angels might conceivably speak of their revelatory and punitive activity, they would

scarcely refer to 'Our sincere servants' (12.24) or say 'We exalt in rank whomsoever We please' (12.76).

Because of Watt's claim that the angelic discourse predominates in the later portions of the Qur'an, I have chosen Surah 5, a late Madīnan surah, as my third example. The speaker employs the first person plural in vv.10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 32, 44, 45, 46, 48, 64–5, and 70. Once again, I shall tabulate the evidence giving third-person-singular (or occasionally first-person-singular) parallels from elsewhere in the Qur'an:

Those who disbelieve and reject Our signs ... (5.10)
Who does greater evil than he who forges a lie against Allah and rejects His signs? (6.21)

We raised up from among them twelve chieftains ... (5.12)
So Allah raised up prophets as proclaimers of good tidings and as warners ... (2.213)

We cursed them and We made their hearts hard ... (5.13)
Allah cursed them ... (2.88)
Allah has set a seal on their hearts ... (2.7)

We accepted their agreement ... (5.14, cf. 70)
Allah accepted an agreement with the Children of Israel ... (5.10)

We have stirred up among them enmity and hatred ... (5.14, cf. 64) – no close parallel.

Our Messenger has come to you ... (5.15, 19)
He it is who has sent His messenger with guidance ... (9.33)

On account of that, We prescribed for the Children of Israel that ... (5.32, cf. 45)
... Seek what Allah has prescribed for you ... (2.187)

We sent down the Torah ... (5.44)
He sent down the Torah ... (3.3)

We caused Jesus the Son of Mary to follow in their footsteps ... (5.46) – no close parallel.

We gave him the Gospel ... (5.46)
... when I taught thee ... the Gospel ... (5.109)

We have sent down to thee the Scripture ... (5.48)
It is He who has sent down to thee the Scripture ... (3.7)

... to everyone of you We have appointed a right way (*SHiR'atan* and a programme of action ... (5.48)

He has laid down (*SHaRa'a*) for you as religion ... (42.13)

We would have acquitted them of their evil deeds and admitted them to gardens ... (5.65)

... I shall acquit you of you evil deeds and admit you to gardens ... (5.12)

... He will acquit you of your evil deeds ... (8.29)

... Allah will admit those who believe and do good works to gardens ... (4.122)

Once again, the sceptic might wish to argue that the existence of third-person parallels is not conclusive and that 'We' is the self-designation of the angels. It is difficult, however, to envisage the angels speaking of 'Our Messenger' (5.15, 19) or claiming 'We would have acquitted them of their evil deeds' (5.65).

If, as the evidence examined so far seems to suggest, the implied speaker of the Qur'an is God, why then does He employ both 'We' and 'He' as self-designations? Moreover, when He employs the first-person-plural mode, why does He sometimes refer to Himself as 'thy Lord' rather than simply as 'Us'? Over thirty years ago, Roman Jakobson wrote an essay on linguistics and poetics which, although it does not mention the Qur'an, throws light on these questions. Jakobson states that verbal communication may be primarily expressive, conative or cognitive. Expressive communication centres on the speaker; conative communication centres on the addressee; and cognitive communication centres on the message.[5] The Qur'anic discourse moves to and fro between these three functions. When the speaker employs oaths or designates Himself as 'We' or 'I', the function of the discourse is expressive. When the speaker employs the vocative particle 'O', refers to the addressee as 'thou' or 'you', or issues commands, the function of the discourse is conative. This is also the case when He refers to Himself as 'thy Lord', for in so doing he reminds the addressee of his subordination to and obligation towards the speaker.[6] Finally, when the speaker refers to Himself as 'He', or 'Allah', or mentions one or more of His names, the function of the discourse is cognitive. This function is vital in a Scripture which is intended as a message for humankind. For if God had restricted Himself to expressive or conative communication, there would have been no universal message, no statements about Him which human beings could reiterate.

11.3 The implied speaker as 'I'

As mentioned earlier, passages in which the implied speaker refers to himself as 'I' are relatively infrequent. Here is the complete list.[7] For convenience, passages in which God quotes what He said in the past or what He will say in the future are distinguished from passages in which He speaks directly.

A. Quoted

1. In narratives about primordial time
(*a*) to the angels concerning His intention of creating Adam: 2.30; 15.28f.; 38.71f.
(*b*) to the angels concerning His superior knowledge: 2.33.
(*c*) to Adam's descendants, in the primordial covenant: 7.172.
(*d*) to Iblis: 7.12, 18; 15.41f.; 17.65a; 38.75, 78, 84–5.
(*e*) to Adam and His spouse on their expulsion from the garden: 2.38; 7.22; 20.123f.

2. In narratives about salvation history
(*a*) to all the Prophets and Messengers: 3.81; 16.2b; 21.25b; 23.51.
(*b*) to Noah: 11.37b; 14.14.
(*c*) to Abraham: 2.124–6; 22.26b.
(*d*) to the people of Lot: 54.37b, 39.
(*e*) to Moses, Aaron, and their mother: 7.143–6; 20.12–15, 39–42, 46, 77; 27.9–11; 28.30; 44.23.
(*f*) to the Israelites in the time of Moses: 5.12; 7.156; 14.7; 17.2b; 20.81b–82.
(*g*) in the Psalms: 21.105.
(*h*) to the people in the time of David: 34.11, 13.
(*i*) to Zechariah: 19.9.
(*j*) to Jesus: 3.55–6.
(*k*) at Badr: 8.9, 12.

3. Not contextualized
(*a*) injunctions given to humankind: 29.8; 31.14–15.
(*b*) said earlier to believers in Muhammad's time: 16.51 (echoing 16.2?); 40.60 (cf. 2.186, not identical)
(*c*) reminder of words said earlier (to Iblis): 32.13b (cf. 7.17).

4. What God will say at the judgment
(*a*) to unbelievers: 6.130; 16.27a; 18.52; 23.105, 108–111; 27.84; 28.62,74; 36.61; 39.59; 41.47; 45.31; 50.28–9; 77.39.

(*b*) to those who were wrongly deemed Allah's associates: 25.17.
(*c*) to Jesus: 5.110–116.
(*d*) to the soul at rest: 89.29–30.

B. Direct

1. To Muhammad
(*a*) about punishment of those who mocked previous messengers: 13.32b.
(*b*) threats in response to those who mock him: 38.8; 51.59; 73.11.
(*c*) about future punishment of unbelievers: 18. 56b, 101–102a, 106; 29.23; 68.44a–5; 74.11–15, 17, 26.
(*d*) 'the word of thy Lord is fulfilled ...': 11.119 (cf. 7.18 to Iblis).
(*e*) giving him messages for the believers: 2.186; 14.31a; 15.49–50; 39.10, 53; 50.45c.

2. To specific groups of Muhammad's contemporaries
(*a*) to the Jews of Arabia: 2.40f., 47, 122.
(*b*) to the Children of Adam: 7.35.
(*c*) to believers: 2.150–52, 160, 197; 3.175, 195; 5.3, 44; 6.153; 21.92; 29.56; 43.61;[8] 51.56–7; 60.1; 61.10.[9]
(*d*) to unbelievers: 18.50b–51; 21.37.

3. Addressee unspecified
(*a*) giving threats and warning: 39.16; 67.18; 86.16; 92.14.
(*b*) about respite for unbelievers: 7.183; 43.29.
(*c*) about previous punishments: 22.44b, 48; 35.26; 40.5b; 50.14b; 54.16=18b=21=30; 54.23.
(*d*) about future rewards: 32.17 'I hide' (or 'is hidden'); 39.17.

4. Oaths
(*a*) at the beginning of surahs: 75.1–2; 90.1.
(*b*) other: 69.38; 70.40a; 81.15–18; 84.16–18.

The divine use of the first person singular is common in narratives about primordial time – a time when God spoke to the angels, Adam, Iblis and the future human race intimately, without using an intermediary. Even in these passages, however, the first-person-singular discourse sometimes implies more than unmediated communication. There is a marked orientation towards the future: the promise of guidance and the warning of final judgment. In 2.38 and 20.123f., for instance, Adam and his spouse are promised that their descendants will receive guidance, and in the latter passage there is a warning that those who forget God will be raised up blind. Likewise, Iblis is told

> I shall fill Hell with thee and with any of them who follow thee' (38.84)

and the future human race are asked

> Am I not your Lord? (7.172)

lest they should say on the Day of Resurrection that they were unaware of it. In this last instance, the first person singular is also highly appropriate because the unity of God is explicitly at stake in His assertion of His sole lordship over human beings. The same is true of 15.42 and 17.65.

The note of intimacy or unmediated communication which is characteristic of narratives about primordial time is often present when the first person singular occurs in narratives about past messengers and their peoples. God is on record as having said 'I' at some of the key junctures in salvation history: when telling Abraham He had made him a leader for humankind (2.124) and instructing him to purify the Ka'bah and not to associate anything with Him (22.26); when speaking to Moses in the hallowed valley (20.12–14; 27.9–11; 28.30) and on the mountain (7.143); when making a covenant with the Children of Israel (5.12; 17.2b); when speaking to Jesus about his approaching rapture (3.55); and when strengthening the believers at the battle of Badr:

> When you were asking your Lord for help and He answered, 'I shall reinforce you with a thousand angels riding behind you' (8.9).

The inclusion of Badr in this series is instructive, for it adds weight to what was said in previous chapters about the immense significance of this event for the newly formed Islamic community.

The narratives about past messengers and their peoples also abound in first-person-singular promises and threats. For instance, Noah was warned:

> Do not address Me concerning those who have done wrong (11.37b);

Lot's people were told:

> Taste My punishment and My warnings! (5.37b, 39);

Abraham was informed concerning anyone who disbelieves:

> I shall give him enjoyment for a while. Then I shall drive him to the torment of the fire (2.126);

And the Children of Israel were assured:

> My chastizement – I smite with it whom I will; but My mercy embraces all things and I shall prescribe it for those who are godfearing (7.156).

It should be noted, however, that in many instances when God uses the first person singular in narratives about past messengers and their peoples, He does so not merely to strike up a note of intimacy or to make promises and threats, but in order in addition to stress the divine unity. This is most obviously the case in the narratives about Abraham and Moses, where God's uniqueness is often expressly mentioned. It is also arguably implicitly the case in many of the other narratives as well. For example, it was appropriate for God to address the believers as 'I' during the battle of Badr, when they were fighting against polytheists who rejected their belief that there was no other deity besides Allah.

In addition to being quoted in narratives about primordial time and in narratives about salvation history, God's first-person-singular discourse is also frequently cited in accounts of the future judgment. Here, too, the communication will be intimate and unmediated, although rarely comforting. Moreover, here too there is often a concern to stress the unity of God and His ultimate vindication against those who wrongly associate other deities with Him.

If we turn now from God's quoted speech to His direct verbal interventions in the time of Muhammad, we find that in the majority of instances where He speaks in the first person singular He mentions future punishments. Occasionally He says 'I' to strike up a note of intimacy. This is the case with the first-person oaths but also, for example, when God speaks to Muhammad of His nearness to the believers during Ramaḍān (2.186), or when He addresses the believers directly during the pilgrimage (2.152; 5.3). It is noteworthy that in the course of Surah 2, the newly-formed Islamic community replaces the Children of Israel as God's people: after the failure of the threefold summons to the latter to 'remember My favour wherewith I favoured you' (2.40, 47, 122), the Muslims are told, 'Do not dread them but dread Me so that I may complete My favour towards you' (2.150). Moreover, the God of whom Moses said, '*He* is the Oft-relenting, the All-merciful' (2.54) and to whom Abraham prayed, '*Thou* art the Oft-relenting, the All-merciful' (2.128), now informs the believers, '*I* am the Oft-relenting, the All-merciful' (2.160).

As heirs to the privileges with which the Children of Israel were once favoured, the Muslims have a duty to worship God alone, a duty in which the Children of Israel constantly failed. The first person singular is therefore often employed because of the need to safeguard the divine unity and rule out any possibility of a polytheistic interpretation. This is the case when the believers are commanded to adopt a particular attitude towards

the speaker: 'dread Me' (2.150); 'remember Me' (2.152); 'be grateful to Me' (2.152); 'fear Me' (2.197); 'revere Me' (3.175, 5.44); 'worship Me' (21.92; 29.56; cf. 43.61); 'follow Me' (51.56); 'seeking to please Me' (60.1). Note that equivalent expressions are never found with the object in the first person plural: 'dread Us', 'remember Us', 'be grateful to Us', and so forth.

11.4 The implied speaker and embedded speakers

Although God is the implied speaker of the Qur'an, He frequently narrates stories in which He quotes words spoken by others. Consider the following examples:

> When Joseph said to his father, 'O my father, I saw eleven stars ...' (12.3).[10]

> The disciples said, 'We believe in Allah ...' (3.52).

In these instances, there is no danger of the reader wrongly inferring from the presence of the first-person pronouns that the speaker is God, for the words are clearly attributed to the disciples and to Joseph, whom I shall refer to as 'embedded speakers'. The same is true *mutatis mutandis* of numerous passages in which God quotes what people will say in the hereafter:

> As for him who is given his book in his left hand, he will say, 'Would that I had not been given my book and not known my reckoning!' (69.25f.)

> Those who believe ... will say, 'Our Lord, perfect our light for us ...' (66.8).

In addition, there are many passages where the first person is employed by Muhammad or by the believers. These are usually clearly signalled by the presence of the imperative 'Say':

> Say, 'If I have strayed I have only led myself astray ...' (34.50).

> Say, 'We believe in Allah and in what has been revealed to us ...' (2.136)

Although as a rule the words of embedded speakers are carefully distinguished from the implied speaker's own words, as in the examples given above, there are a few instances where this not the case. There is one passage where words which were apparently spoken by Jesus are not preceded by 'he said':

> And lo! Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him. That is the straight path (19.36).[11]

There are six passages where words which were evidently spoken by Muhammad are not preceded by 'Say':

> I am not a keeper over you (6.104).
>
> Shall I desire other than Allah for judge ...? (6.114)
>
> Lo! I am unto you from Him a warner and a bringer of good tidings. ... I fear for you the retribution of an awful day (11.2f.).
>
> I am commanded only to worship the Lord of this land ...(27.91f.).
>
> Such is my Lord in whom I put my trust and unto whom I turn (42.10).
>
> So flee to Allah. I am unto you from Him a plain warner. Do not place any other deity alongside Allah. I am unto you from Him a plain warner (51.50f.).

There are two passages in which words that are universally regarded as having been spoken by the revelatory angels are not preceded by 'they said':

> And we do not descend but by the command of thy Lord; to Him belongs whatever is before us and whatever is behind us and whatever is between these, and thy Lord is not forgetful (19.64).
>
> And there is none of us but has an assigned place. And most surely we are they who draw themselves out in ranks. And we are most surely they who declare the glory [of Allah] (37.164–6).

Finally, there a number of passages, such as 1.6 and 2.286, in which prayers of the believers occur without an introductory 'Say'. We must now explore the possible significance of all these exceptions to the rule.

The way in which Jesus' words are cited in 19.36, without any indication that they should be attributed to an embedded speaker, is less remarkable than might seem to the casual reader. It should be born in mind that the Qur'an was originally an oral phenomenon and that a practised raconteur will frequently indicate a change in speaker by employing non-verbal gestures and a different tone of voice, without having recourse to introductory formulae such as 'he said'. In any case, in this instance Jesus' words cannot be confused with those of the implied speaker because God would not say 'Allah is my Lord'. Moreover, 19.36 is identical to 43.64 and 3.51, where it is evident from the context that the

words should be attributed to Jesus. Similar considerations are pertinent in connection with the six passages mentioned above, where the speaker is Muhammad. In all of them, the words are such as would hardly have been spoken by God. Moreover most of them are set expressions attributed elsewhere in the Qur'an to human messengers.[12] Nevertheless, the very existence of these seven passages should alert us to the possibility that there may conceivably be other āyahs where 'I' is the self-designation of Muhammad rather than God. The reader who takes the trouble to examine all the passages mentioned in Chapter 11.4 will discover, however, that the wording of the majority of them precludes their being the speech of a mortal. With the exception of the oaths, which form a distinct category, there are only two passages where there is any possible ambiguity:

> Follow me, that is the straight path (43.61).

> O you who believe, shall I direct you to a commerce that will deliver you from a painful punishment? (61.10).

These could conceivably have been spoken by God, but an examination of them in the light of Qur'anic usage suggests that we should probably infer that Muhammad is the speaker. For nowhere else does God say 'Follow me', although Muhammad says this in 3.31; Aaron says it in 20.90; and a contemporary of Moses says it in 40.38. Nowhere else does God say 'Shall I direct you?', but Moses' sister does in 20.40 and 28.12; Satan says 'shall I direct thee?' in 20.120; and unbelievers say 'Shall we direct you?' in 34.7.

As mentioned above, the six clusters of first-person-singular oaths represent a distinct category. If they are read without any dogmatic presuppositions about the Qur'an in its entirety being the Word of God, it might be thought that they are simply oaths sworn by Muhammad. Careful attention to the context shows, however, that this is not in fact the case. The oaths in 75.1–2; 90.1; 69.38, and 70.40a are followed abruptly by utterances in the first person plural which make it clear that God is the implied speaker.[13] The oaths in 81.15–18 introduce a revelatory section in which Muhammad is objectified as 'your companion' (81.22–24), and those in 84.16–18 introduce a polemical section, which is followed by a concluding directive addressed to Muhammad and thus clearly spoken by God (84.24).

It remains for us to examine the passages where speakers other than God employ the first person plural without any introductory formula. Āyahs which are prayers, like 1.6 and 2.286, need not detain us; it is

obvious that, from the Qur'anic perspective, they comprise words which God has revealed to humankind as suitable formulae with which to address Him. Much more perplexing are the two passages (19.64 and 37.164–6) where the speaker is clearly Gabriel or the revelatory angels, for my admission that such passages exist might be thought to cast doubt on my earlier contention that the We-discourse is normally divine rather than angelic. Indeed, the reader who is familiar with the Hebrew Bible might wish to argue that I have drawn too sharp a contrast between divine discourse and angelic discourse, and to suggest that the Qur'anic 'We' may often be the self-designation of God *and* His angels. After all, there are a number of passages in the Hebrew Bible where YHWH and one or more angels act in unison. The most famous of these is Genesis 18.1–19.1.[14] There, YHWH is said to have appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre (18.1), although what Abraham saw was three men whom he evidently realized were angelic beings (18.2). The 'men' later turned and went towards Sodom, while YHWH remained standing before Abraham (18.22), a statement which shocked subsequent scribes, who emended the text so that Abraham remained standing before YHWH.[15] The precise relationship between YHWH and the three is not defined, but it might be inferred that He was one of them because He subsequently went His way (18.33) and only two angels reached Sodom (19.1).

Attractive though it may seem, the suggestion that the Qur'anic 'We' should be interpreted in the light of the Hebrew Bible, as the self-designation of God and His angels speaking in unison, does not stand up to scrutiny. For one thing, divine We-discourse is extremely rare in the Hebrew Bible, whereas in the Qur'an it is relatively common. For another, it is striking that in all four of the Qur'anic versions of the above-mentioned story from Genesis,[16] Abraham's guests are carefully distinguished from the implied speaker, and that in two of these versions the guests are explicitly referred to as 'Our messengers'.[17] The Qur'an thus appears to correct biblical theology and angelology rather than to adopt it uncritically. It seems probable, therefore, that God is indeed the implied speaker of the Qur'anic We-discourse, and that 19.64 and 37.164–6 are isolated exceptions to the rule. Moreover, when these two passages are examined in context, they appear slightly less perplexing than they do at first sight. Surah 37.149–163 contains an outright attack on the beliefs of the Meccan pagans who held that the angels were Allah's daughters, and who alleged that He was also related to the jinn. In the course of this polemic God says:

> Or did We create the angels female while they were witnesses? (37.150).

There could be no better proof than this that the We-discourse is generally spoken by God rather than the angels. But once the theology and angelology have been made clear, dramatic effect is achieved by allowing the angels to bear witness to their subordinate position, unannounced and in their own words, in 37.164–6. As for Surah 19, it is noteworthy that it contains no less than four āyahs in which direct speech is introduced very abruptly: the first is v.7, which gives God's reply to Zechariah's prayer; the second is v.9, where John, whose birth has just been foretold, is suddenly addressed and ordered to hold fast to the Scripture; the third is v.36 where, as we saw above, Jesus is the speaker despite the absence of the customary 'he said'; the fourth is the angelic discourse in v.64. This sudden intrusion by the angels is thus in character with the previous three narrative lacunae in the same surah. Quite why it occurs at this point is unclear, but the classical commentators are unanimous that the revelation of this āyah was occasioned by the Prophet's asking Gabriel why he did not visit him more frequently. The details vary, but according to one version of the tradition the Prophet's question was prompted by his sadness that Gabriel had not brought him revelations for eleven nights, and according to another the Meccans were starting to say that Gabriel had deserted him.[18] If this information is reliable, it would make sense for the āyah in question to have been subsequently incorporated in a surah which begins with the story of how good tidings were announced to Zechariah (v.7), and how he was subsequently prevented from speaking for three nights (v.10), and which ends with the Prophet being told that the revelation has been made easy on his tongue so that he may announce good tidings to the godfearing (v.97).[19]

11.5 The omniscient perspective of the implied speaker

Seven surahs contain one or more āyahs which indicate that the speaker allegedly witnessed events that took place long ago and that He is consequently in a position to narrate what happened in the minutest detail. This is the case with the story of Joseph, in Surah 12:

> We narrate to thee the best of narratives in that We have revealed to thee this Qur'an, though before this thou wast certainly one of those who did not know … This is of the announcements relating to the unseen which We reveal to thee, and thou wast not with them

> when they resolved upon their affair, and they were devising plans (12.3,102).

Similar things are said in Surah 28 about the story of Moses, in Surah 3 about the story of Mary, and in Surah 11 about the story of Noah:

> And thou wast not on the western slope when We revealed to Moses the commandment, and thou wast not among the witnesses...and thou wast not dwelling among the people of Midian, reciting to them Our signs... And thou wast not on the slope of the mountain when We called out... (28.44–46).

> This is of the announcements relating to the unseen which We reveal to thee. Thou wast not with them when they cast their pens to decide which of them should have Mary in his charge, and thou wast not with them when they contended one with another (3.44).

> These are announcements relating to the unseen which We reveal to thee. Thou didst not know them, neither thou nor thy people before this... (11.49, cf. 100,120).

The four instances cited above occur in We-thou discourse and it is noteworthy that all four highlight not only the omniscience of the speaker but also the previous ignorance of the privileged addressee. The next example occurs in He-you discourse and focuses on the ignorance of the wider audience:

> Nay! were you witnesses when death visited Jacob, when he said to his sons: 'What will you serve after me?' They said: 'We shall serve thy God and the God of thy fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, one God only, and to Him do we submit' (2.133).

The remaining two instances concern the destruction of the people of 'Ād, which is narrated in Surah 69, and the miraculous preservation of persecuted youths who slept in a cave for over three centuries, which is narrated in Surah 18:

> And as to 'Ād, they were destroyed by a roaring, violent blast, which He made to prevail against them for seven nights and eight days unremittingly, so that thou mightest have seen the people therein prostrate as if they were the trunks of hollow palms. Seest thou then of them one remaining? (69.6–8)

> We relate to thee their story with the truth; surely they were youths who believed in their Lord and We increased them in guidance ... And

> thou mightest have seen the sun, when it rose, decline from their cave towards the right, and when it set, leave them behind on the left while they were in a wide space thereof... And thou wouldest have thought them awake while they were asleep and We turned them about to the right and to the left, while their dog lay outstretching its paws at the entrance. If thou hadst looked at them thou wouldest certainly have turned back from them in flight, and thou wouldest certainly have been filled with awe because of them (18.13, 17a, 18).

Although both of these occur in We-thou discourse, it is noteworthy that in both instances the conative function is more developed than the expressive function. The addressee is not simply made aware of his ignorance in comparison with the divine omniscience. Rather, a concerted effort is made to evoke from him fear and awe at the sight which is presented to his imagination.

In addition to the seven surahs which stress the speaker's knowledge of past events, a further four surahs indicate his knowledge of the future:

> And if only thou couldest see when they will be made to stand before the Fire... (6.27 = 6.30).

> And if only thou couldest see when the unjust will be in the agonies of death... (6.93).

> And if only thou couldest see when the angels will gather in death those who disbelieve... (8.50).

> And if only thou couldest see when the guilty will hang down their heads before their Lord... (32.12).

> And if only thou couldest see when the unjust will be made to stand before their Lord... (34.31).

> And if only thou couldest see when they will become terrified... (34.51).

In all these passages, the conative function predominates. Their purpose is to arouse fear in the addressee at the thought of the impending Judgment and the punishment of sinners.

11.6 The implied privileged addressee

In modern English there is only one second-person personal pronoun. The same word, 'you', is employed regardless of whether the addressee is male or female, an individual, two persons or more than two. In Qur'anic

Arabic there is much less ambiguity, because there are five different forms of the second-person personal pronoun and corresponding inflections of the verb: masculine singular, feminine singular, dual, masculine plural and feminine plural. Fortunately, for our present purposes we need only concern ourselves with two of these five forms: the masculine singular, which is employed when the addressee is an individual male, and the masculine plural, which is employed when the addressee is a group of people, some or all of whom are males. In order to distinguish between these two forms, I shall use the antiquated English 'thou' to indicate the singular and I shall only employ 'you' when the addressee is plural.

In the Qur'an, the implied speaker frequently addresses an individual 'thou' – the implied privileged addressee. We saw in Chapter 2 that it may be inferred that this individual is usually Muhammad, although curiously his name is never employed when he is being addressed – a capital point to which I shall return in due course. When other individuals (including Adam, Iblis and the prophets Abraham, Moses and Jesus) are addressed as 'thou' in quoted discourse, their identity is always clear. Nor is any difficulty posed by the existence of Qur'anic prayers in which the believers address God as 'thou'. There are, however, at least four passages, which are neither quoted discourse nor prayers, in which the second person singular is employed for an addressee other than Muhammad. In two of these the addressee is explicitly said to be humankind. The first is a signs controversy:

> O humankind, who has lured thee away from thy Gracious Lord who created thee, fashioned thee, proportioned thee, and composed thee in whatever shape He wished? (82.6–8).

The second is a warning:

> O humankind, thou art constantly toiling towards thy Lord and thou shalt meet Him! (84.6).

The other two passages comprise instructions on how to treat one's parents:

> ... whether one or both of them should reach old age with thee. Say not to them, 'Fie!', nor chide them, but speak to them graciously and lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, 'My Lord, have mercy on them just as they cared for me when I was small' (17.24).

> ... Yet if they should strive to make thee associate with Me anything of which thou hast no knowledge, do not obey them ... (29.8).

In view of the fact that Muhammad was an orphan (94.6), the addressee cannot be him, but must rather be the typical believer.

The existence of these four passages raises the possibility that there may be others in which the addressee is humankind or the typical believer rather than Muhammad. Take, for instance, Surah 82. We have seen that the signs controversy in vv.6–8 is addressed to humankind. Is it not therefore possible that this is also the case with the didactic questions in vv.18–19? And if the didactic questions in 82.18–19 are addressed to humankind, might not this be the case with the didactic questions in other surahs as well? The evidence is evenly divided: in Surahs 77, 97, 101 and 104 the second person singular occurs exclusively in the didactic questions,[20] which could therefore be addressed to humankind; whereas in Surahs 69, 74, 83, 86 and 90 the second person singular also occurs in āyahs where the addressee seems to be Muhammad.[21] This makes it more likely that in these surahs he is the addressee in the didactic questions as well. There is a similar problem with other types of rhetorical question addressed to an individual: in 105.1, which introduces a narrative, and 107.1, which introduces polemic, the addressee might be either humankind or Muhammad; in 85.17 and 96.4, 11, 13, on the other hand, the addressee is probably Muhammad, although this is by no means certain.[22] Other passages where it is difficult to decide whether or not the addressee is Muhammad include many of the instances where the singular imperative 'Say!' is employed, especially when it introduces liturgical formulae, as in the first āyah of Surahs 109, 112, 113 and 114.

Although I have endeavoured to isolate passages in which the implied individual addressee is humankind or the typical believer rather than Muhammad, in practice the distinction is relatively unimportant. It is arguable that one of the reasons why the Qur'anic discourse is so effective is that, in reciting the Qur'an, the ordinary believer feels that in a sense he stands in the place of Muhammad, and that the message first vouchsafed to Muhammad is now addressed personally to him.[23] This is because, as we saw in Chapter 2, there is little in that message which is specific to a particular time and place. Moreover, Muhammad is never named as the privileged addressee. There are admittedly a few passages which begin 'O Prophet',[24] or which refer explicitly to particular situations,[25] but these are comparatively rare and occur almost exclusively in Madīnan surahs. In the Meccan surahs, even the āyahs which I have identified as belonging to 'Messenger sections' are for the most part applicable to the ordinary believer *as well as* to the Prophet.

An example should help make this clear. Surah 87 opens with a liturgical bidding:

> Glorify the name of thy Lord the Most High (87.1).

Although the believer does not doubt that this was first addressed to Muhammad, he nonetheless experiences it as a command addressed to him personally, here and now, because he has been taught that, as a good Muslim, every time he prostrates himself in prayer he should say at least three times, 'Glory be to my Lord the Most High'. The liturgical bidding is followed in vv.2–5 by a hymnic signs list which is sufficiently general to appeal to most worshippers. Then there is a Messenger section which begins with a call to Qur'anic recitation:

> We shall cause thee to recite and thou wilt not forget, except what Allah wills. He knows what is uttered aloud and what is hidden. And We shall bring thee with ease to the easy way (87.6–8).

Here, too, the individual believer realizes that the addressee was in the first instance the Prophet. If he is a scholar, he may also be aware that these āyahs have traditionally been linked with the doctrine of abrogation.[26] Yet this in no way diminishes his appreciation of the extraordinary relevance of the instructions to his own situation, as one who is anxious to recite the surah correctly from memory. Finally, the Messenger section ends with a call to remind:

> So remind, if the reminder profits (87.9).

It is obvious that this instruction was originally intended for the Prophet, who was charged with reminding or admonishing the Meccan idolators, but once again the believer cannot help feeling that it applies equally to him; it is incumbent on him to remind his own compatriots of the signs of God's power mentioned earlier in the surah, and of the hereafter which is mentioned in what follows. Examples like this could be multiplied. When reciting the Qur'an with understanding, the devout Muslim feels that he personally is being addressed by a transcendent and omniscient magisterial speaker who draws his attention to the signs of His power and beneficence, vouchsafes to him the true version of events that happened long ago, reassures him when others mock his faith, and empowers him to warn his contemporaries of the impending judgment.

11.7 The objectification of the Messenger

In Section 2, I argued that the frequent references to God in the third person as 'He', 'Allah', 'the All-merciful' and so on are not incompatible with God Himself being the implied speaker. I further suggested that the reason why the implied speaker frequently objectifies himself in this manner is that the Qur'an has an important cognitive function: it conveys a universal message of which statements about God are an important component. It will not, however, have escaped the notice of the attentive reader of the Qur'an that the Messenger, whom I have identified as the implied privileged addressee, is also objectified on numerous occasions. This does not occur when he is addressed as 'thou', but when the process of communication is short-circuited and the wider audience, to whom he is elsewhere charged to convey the message, is addressed directly by the implied speaker as 'you'. In the Meccan surahs it is most common in the revelation sections.[27] Note especially the rebuttals of accusations in which he is referred to as 'your companion' (52.2–3,11,17; 81.22), the accounts of his visions (53.5–10,13–18; 81.23), and the dramatic disclaimer (69.44–46), which serve to impress on the audience the authenticity of his experience. In the Madīnan surahs, the privileged addressee is frequently referred to as 'the Messenger', 'the Messenger of Allah' or 'His Messenger', and occasionally as 'Muhammad' or 'the Prophet'. Consider, for instance, these three passages from Surah 33:

> The Prophet is nearer to the believers than their selves, and his wives are their mothers (33.6).
>
> Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets (33.40).
>
> Allah and His angels send their benedictions on the Prophet. O you who believe, send your benedictions on him and salute him with peace (33.56).

This surah was revealed in the aftermath of the siege of Yathrib, during which there were repeated attempts to undermine Muhammad's authority. It is clear that he emerged from the crisis greatly strengthened – so much so that the universal message of the Qur'an now includes statements about him like these. However, the objectification of Muhammad reaches its peak in Surah 9, which is indubitably one of the latest Madīnan surahs. It repeatedly refers to 'Allah and His Messenger' (9.1,3,7,16,24,29 etc.) and the penultimate āyah (9.128) describes the Messenger as 'all-pitying all-merciful', qualities which are elsewhere ascribed to Allah.[28]

11.8 Sudden changes in person and number

For European readers, one of the most disconcerting features of Qur'anic style is the frequent occurrence of unexpected (and apparently unwarranted) shifts from one pronoun to another. Non-Muslim scholars have tended either to regard these changes as solecisms or simply to ignore them.[29] Muslim specialists in Arabic rhetoric, on the other hand, refer to this phenomenon as *iltifāt* – literally 'conversion', or 'turning one's face to' – and define it as:

> the change of speech from one mode to another, for the sake of freshness and variety for the listener, to renew his interest, and to keep his mind from boredom and frustration, through having the one mode continuously at his ear.[30]

Far from dismissing it as a stylistic imperfection, they have prized it as *shajā'at al-'arabiyyah* – 'the audacity of Arabic' – and have attempted to explain the purpose of the various types of shift. As this subject has recently been dealt with at length by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem,[31] I shall limit my discussion to a few striking examples which occur within single āyahs or sequences of āyahs devoted to the same theme. In order to facilitate the task of the reader, first-person-plural discourse will be printed in bold type and first-person-singular discourse will be printed in bold italics.

11.8.1 Third person singular to first person plural

Consider the following extract from the revelation section in Surah 69. After the rebuttals of the accusations, the polemical asides, and the affirmation concerning the status of the message, there is a dramatic disclaimer in the first person plural:

> It is not the statement of a poet – little do you believe! Nor is it the statement of a soothsayer – little do you remember! It is something sent down by the Lord of the Worlds. **And if he had fabricated against Us some of the sayings, We would certainly have seized him by the right hand. Then We would certainly have cut his main artery and not one of you could have prevented it!** (69.41–47).

I have already drawn attention to the way in which this disclaimer achieves its effect by objectifying the Messenger, but that is only part of the story. In addition, there is the shock effect of the sudden shift from third-person discourse about 'the Lord of the Worlds', which makes Him

seem distant and transcendent, to the immediacy with which He speaks in the first person. The fact that He employs the first person plural emphasizes His majesty and power.

A similar effect may be observed in the polemical section of Surah 96, in the transition from the first part of the lampoon to the menacing peroration:

> Does he not know that Allah sees?
> Of course not! Yet if he does not stop **We shall drag him by the forelock** ... (96.14f.)

Note that here, too, the first person plural is used when violent action is envisaged.

The sudden shift from the third person singular to the first person plural is also common in signs passages, where it invariably occurs at the point where the sending down of life-producing water is mentioned. The following example is typical:

> And it is Allah who sends the winds so that they stir up the clouds, **and We drive them to a dead land and revive therewith the earth after its death. Such will be the resurrection** (35.9).[32]

The reason why the shift occurs at this point is that God's revival of the land is seen as evidence of His power to raise the dead.

11.8.2 Third person singular to first person singular

Passages in which there is a sudden shift from the third person singular to the first person singular are much less common. In the following example, as with the first passage considered in the previous section, a shock effect is produced by the way in which language which stresses God's transcendence is followed by the irruption of first-person discourse:

> The command of Allah comes; so seek not to hasten it. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above that which they associate with Him. He sends down His angels with the Spirit on whomsoever He wills of His servants, ***Warn that there is no deity but I. So fear Me!*** (16.1f.).

In this instance, the first person singular is obviously more appropriate than the the first person plural, because it is the unity of God which is in question, rather than His power. The first person singular is also required by the exigences of rhyme.

A similar effect may be observed in the following passage, which is likewise polemical:

So worship what you like beside Him. Say: 'The losers are those who will lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection. Truly that will be a manifest loss!' They shall have sheets of fire above them and below them. That is how Allah frightens His servants. ***O My servants, so fear Me!*** (39.15f.).

Here, too, the unity of God is in question. Moreover, once again the first person singular is also necessitated by the rhyme.

My third example is somewhat different from the previous two, because the first-person discourse represents what God will say on the Day of Resurrection:

So on that day none will punish as He will punish and none will bind as He will bind. O tranquil soul, return to thy Lord well pleased and pleasing. ***Enter among My servants, and enter My garden*** (89.25–30).

Note, however, that although the unity of God is not mentioned explicitly, the words 'return to thy Lord' are a reminder of the primordial covenant with Adam's descendants (7.172f), in which they ascribed to the exclusive Lordship of Allah. Note too that the shift is highly effective because it occurs at the very end of a surah in which there is no other first-person discourse, but in which Allah is repeatedly referred to as 'thy Lord'.

11.8.3 First person plural or singular to third person singular

A shift from the first person plural to the third person singular generally marks a transition from the expressive function to the cognitive function, as in the following example:

Thus We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an and We have turned about in it something of threats in order that they may be godfearing or it may arouse in them remembrance. Exalted be Allah the True King ... (20.113f.).

In this instance, the shift not only ensures the presence of a message, by furnishing a statement which can be re-employed by believers, but also serves to efface the Messenger by making it clear that it is not he who is to be extolled.

The same process is at work where the shift is from the first person singular to the third person singular, as in the following two passages:

Their predecessors cried lies and how great was My horror! Have they not regarded the birds above them, spreading their wings and

closing them? Nought holds them but the All-merciful. Surely He sees everything (67.18f.).

Therefore fear not humankind but fear Me and sell not My signs for a paltry price. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has sent down – they are the losers (5.44).

In both instances, the shift furnishes a message which can be repeated. It also affirms Allah's transcendence.

11.8.4 First person singular to first person plural

A shift from the first person singular to the first person plural often occurs in order to stress the power and majesty of the speaker, as in the following passage:

And whoever turns away from My reminder, his shall be a straitened life, **and We shall raise him on the day of resurrection, blind** (20.124f.).

Shifts of this kind occur in four surahs which begin with oaths. The following is typical:

Nay I swear by the Day of Resurrection!
Nay I swear by the self-accusing soul!
Does Man think that We shall not gather his bones?
(75.1–3).[33]

Because the oaths are in the first person singular, they establish direct and immediate communication, but the shift to the first person plural is necessary in order to safeguard against the reader wrongly inferring that it is Muhammad who is swearing them.

11.8.5 First person plural to first person singular

A shift from the first person plural to the first person singular introduces a note of intimacy or immediacy. The context may concern the provision of guidance, as in God's words when expelling Adam from paradise:

We said: 'Get down all of you from this place. *So surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve …'* (2.38).

Alternatively, the shift may mark the transition from instruction to threat, as in God's words to Noah:

And make the ark before Our eyes and [in accordance with] Our revelation, *and do not speak to Me in respect of those who are unjust; surely they shall be drowned* (11.37).

The following passage, in which God addresses Muhammad, is another example of this:

We know best what they say, and thou art not one to compel them; therefore remind by means of the Qur'an him who fears *My threat* (50.45).

In this instance, the shift to the first person singular is also necessitated by the rhyme. It is particularly effective, coming as it does at the very end of the surah.

11.8.6 From the third person to the second person

All the passages examined so far have involved a change in the person or number of the pronouns representing the speaker, but *iltifāt* also occurs with respect to the addressee. Most commonly this involves a shift from the third person to the second person, which I shall indicate by changing from roman to italic. The best-known example occurs in the *fātiḥah*, where it marks the worshippers' turning to God in request:

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds
The Most-merciful, the All-Merciful,
the Master of the Day of Recompense.
Thee only do we worship, thee only do we ask for help (1.2–5).

Usually, however, shifts of this kind occur when God is the speaker. Sometimes He turns to address those whom He has been speaking about, in order to threaten them:

They say the All-merciful has taken to Himself a son. *You have advanced something monstrous!* (19.88f.).

Sometimes, on the contrary, He turns to address them in order to honour them by His nearness:

Surely the godfearing shall be in gardens and bliss, rejoicing in what their Lord has given them. And their Lord will guard them against the punishment of Hell. *Eat and drink with wholesome appetite because of what you used to do* (52.17–19).

11.8.7 From the second person to the third person

More rarely, the shift may be from the second person to the third person. This has the effect of objectifying the addressees. It may be done in order to enable them to gain self-knowledge by seeing themselves externally, as in the following example:

> *And Allah has given you wives of your own kind, and has given you sons and grandchildren from your wives, and has bestowed good things on you.* Do they then believe in falsehood and disbelieve in Allah's favour? (16.72).

Alternatively, the speaker may wish to distance himself from the addressees in order to humiliate them,

> *That is because you took Allah's signs for a jest and the life of the world deceived you.* So on that day they shall not be brought forth from it, nor shall they be granted goodwill (45.35),

or in order to honour them,

> *Then give to the near of kin his due, and to the needy and the wayfarer*; this is best for those who desire Allah's pleasure, and these it is who are successful (30.38).

11.8.8 More complex examples

There are in the Qur'an a number of passages which contain two or more pronominal shifts in the space of a few āyahs. To the reader who is familiar with the different types of shift and their significance, these should not pose too many problems. My first example is relatively straightforward, despite the fact that the speaker shifts from the first person plural to the first person singular, and then to the third person singular, before finally reverting to the first person plural:

> **By no means! Surely We have created them of what they know.** ***But nay! I swear by*** the Lord of the eastern places and of the western places that **We are certainly able to replace them by others better than them** ... (70.39–41).

The two pieces of first-person-plural discourse would be perfectly intelligible if read consecutively, ignoring the intervening material. God is the speaker, and His use of 'We' is entirely appropriate in this context where He speaks of His power to create human beings. The temporary adoption of the first person singular establishes the immediacy of the

oath, while the reference to God as 'the Lord of the eastern places and of the western places' ensures that the cognitive function of the Qur'anic discourse is not neglected.

My next example is the celebrated reference to the Night Journey, together with the two āyahs which follow it:

> Glory be to Him who caused His servant to travel by night from the inviolable place of worship to the furthest place of worship, **the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him some of Our signs;** surely He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing. **And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guidance to the Children of Israel,** ***'Do not take a protector besides Me'.*** [They were] **the offspring of those whom We bore with Noah; surely he was a grateful servant** (17. 1–3).

The words in ordinary type, with which the surah opens, correspond to the language which human beings customarily employ when engaging in worship, but the reference to Muhammad as 'His servant' safeguards against the inference that these words are uttered by him. The sudden shift to the first person plural is appropriate in view of the fact that the Night Journey was an expression of God's majesty and power. This shift also makes clear that God is the speaker. The shift back to third-person discourse maintains the sense of worship and ensures the cognitive function of the communication. The resumption of the first person plural for the references to Moses and Noah serves to put what happened at the furthest place of worship on a par with two previous demonstrations of God's majesty and power: the revelation of the Torah and the preservation of Noah's family from the flood. Within this first-person-plural discourse, the brief quotation in which God speaks in the first person singular strikes a note of peculiar intimacy and draws attention to the central importance of the exclusive claims of the One God.

Now let us examine three āyahs which begin with the singular imperative 'Say', but which include words spoken by God in the first person:

> Say, 'If the sea were ink [for writing] the words of my Lord, surely the sea would be used up before the words of my Lord were completed, **even if We brought another like it to replenish it'** (18.109).

> *Say, 'If there were on the earth angels walking about in peace and security,* **We would certainly have sent down for them from the sky an angel as a messenger'** (17.95).

> Say, '***O My servants who have transgressed against themselves***, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Truly Allah forgives sins. He is the All-forgiving, All-merciful' (39.53).

In the first of these, a surprise effect is achieved by the sudden shift to the first person plural. God Himself intervenes in all His majesty to utter fresh words, thereby showing that (as stated) His words will never be complete. In the second, the intervention is again in the first person plural, but it coincides with a shift to the third person plural 'them' to refer to the addressees. Thus, at the moment when God intervenes to express His power and majesty, He also distances Himself from the unbelievers in order to humiliate them. The third āyah is more puzzling because the imperative 'Say' is immediately followed by God's speech in the first person singular. Although this strains the normal rules of syntax, it establishes intimate communication between God and the believers, thus making them more receptive to the cognitive element of the message which is to follow.

My final example is a passage which non-Muslim scholars have frequently treated with scorn:

> *He it is who makes you travel by land and sea; until when you are in the ships* and they sail on with them in a pleasant breeze, and they rejoice, a violent wind overtakes them and the billows surge in on them from all sides, and they become certain that they are encompassed about, they pray to Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience: 'If Thou dost deliver us from this, we shall most certainly be of the grateful ones.' But when He delivers them, lo! they are unjustly rebellious in the earth. *O humankind! your rebellion is against your own souls – provision of this world's life* – ***then to Us shall be your return, so We shall inform you of what you did*** (10.22f.).

At first sight it may appear hopelessly garbled, but the three consecutive pronominal shifts are all perfectly logical. The shift from the second person plural to the third person plural objectifies the addressees and enables them to see themselves as God sees them, and to recognize how ridiculous and hypocritical their behaviour is. The shift back to the second person plural marks God's turning to admonish them. Finally the speaker's shift from the third person singular to the first person plural expresses His majesty and power, which is appropriate in view of the allusion to the resurrection and judgment.

11.9 Conclusion

The Qur'anic discourse is admittedly highly unusual in numerous respects. Nevertheless, if the Qur'an is treated as a closed corpus, it appears perfectly consistent. God is the implied speaker throughout, but He employs the third person singular, the first person plural and the first person singular to refer to Himself. Third-person-singular discourse and first-person-plural discourse are used when speaking of the same range of actions, but the latter is employed when He wishes to express His power, majesty or generosity, whereas the former is necessitated by the cognitive function of the Qur'an: the task of conveying to humankind a universal message in language which they themselves can re-use in speaking about God and in addressing Him.

The first-person-singular discourse is much rarer and covers a more restricted range of divine actions: it is most common in contexts where the divine unity has to be safeguarded, when God wishes to be particularly intimate with His servants, or when He expresses His wrath. It occurs most frequently in His quoted speech: in narratives about primordial time, in narratives about key moments in salvation history, and in proleptic accounts of the future judgment. But it also occurs sporadically when Muhammad or his contemporaries are addressed, and in oaths. God's use of the first person singular at Badr (8.9,12) assures the battle's status as a key event in salvation history and puts it on a par with key events in the lives of previous peoples and their messengers. Likewise, His use of the first person singular when addressing the believers during the pilgrimage (2.152; 5.3) is in keeping with the Abrahamic status of their rites and suggests that the Islamic community has replaced the Children of Israel as the object of God's intimacy and the guardian of the monotheistic faith.

Embedded speakers also employ the first person singular or the first person plural, but their speech is usually easily distinguishable from that of the implied speaker because it is preceded by words such as 'he said', 'they said', or 'say!'. There are only about a dozen exceptions where no such introductory formula is present. In most of them, it is obvious from the context (or from the nature of the utterance) that the speaker is Muhammad, the revelatory angels or the believers, rather than God. There are no grounds for attributing other first-person-singular utterances to Muhammad or for supposing, as Watt does, that in the later surahs the first person plural is invariably the self-designation of the angels.

The implied speaker narrates what happened in the past, and describes what will happen in the future, from an omniscient perspective. As the implied speaker is God – and as God is frequently referred to as the All-knowing, the All-seeing and the All-hearing – this is hardly surprising. Nevertheless, careful attention to those passages in which the omniscient perspective is highlighted reveals that their primary purpose is to produce fear and awe in the listener, rather than simply to convey information which is historically accurate.

The conative function of communication is also to the fore when the implied speaker refers to Himself as 'thy Lord' while speaking to the privileged addressee. The privileged addressee is usually Muhammad, but there are a few passages where 'thou' is used when addressing humankind or the typical believer. In practice, the distinction is relatively unimportant, because the believer rightly senses that the message first vouchsafed to Muhammad is also addressed personally to him. Even the āyahs which belong to 'Messenger sections' are for the most part applicable to the ordinary believer *as well as* to the Prophet.

Although the implied speaker often addresses the privileged addressee as 'thou' and entrusts him with conveying the message to a wider audience, he sometimes addresses the wider audience directly as 'you'. When He does this, He tends to objectify Muhammad by referring to him as 'the Messenger', 'your companion', and so forth. In the Meccan surahs this occurs most frequently in revelation sections, where it is a very effective way of defending the reality of Muhammad's prophetic experience and the authenticity of the revelation. In the Madīnan surahs the objectification of Muhammad is much more common, especially after the siege of Yathrib, and reflects his enhanced status.

Sudden pronominal shifts are characteristic of the Qur'anic discourse. Although they sometimes strain the rules of syntax to the limit, they are a very effective rhetorical device. The implied speaker shifts from 'He' to 'We' as a self-designation, in contexts where He wishes to express the plurality of His power or generosity; He shifts from 'He' to 'I' when He wishes to express His immanence, especially when the divine unity is at stake; He shifts from 'We' or 'I' to 'He' in order to introduce a cognitive element into the discourse; He shifts from 'I' to 'We' to stress His power and to safeguard against anyone inferring that the utterance is Muhammad's; and He shifts from 'We' to 'I' to introduce an element of immediacy, intimacy or threat. Similar pronominal shifts also occur in respect of the addressee. The speaker may suddenly turn from talking about 'them' to addressing them as 'you', either to threaten them or

to honour them. Alternatively, He may suddenly turn from addressing them as 'you' to referring to them as 'them', either to honour them, to humiliate them or to enable them to gain self-knowledge by seeing themselves as they appear to others. A whole series of pronominal shifts of various kinds may occur in the space of a few āyahs but they usually comply with these rules.

12

The Order of the Surahs: The Decreasing-Length Rule

12.1 Introduction

It should by now be clear that, at the level of the individual surahs, the Qur'an is a much more orderly and coherent work than is generally recognized. But what of the structure of the Scripture as a whole? I shall begin this chapter by dealing with a common misconception among non-specialists, namely the notion that the surahs are chapters and that, like chapter headings in a book, their names ought therefore to be a reliable guide to their contents. Then, I shall review the evidence for precedents and parallels to the seemingly odd editorial procedure of arranging the surahs roughly in order of decreasing length. Next, I shall scrutinize the exceptions to the decreasing-length rule in the current arrangement of the surahs, and the reasons which have been put forward to explain these exceptions. This will be followed by a discussion of the significance of the alleged order of the surahs in the manuscripts of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy. Finally, I shall draw attention to the fact that key words towards the end of one surah often recur near the beginning of the next – a phenomenon which suggests that other factors besides the relative length of the surahs may have influenced the editor or editors of the Qur'an. All this will prepare the ground for the next chapter, in which I shall examine a modern attempt to detect a coherent thematic development in the sequence of the surahs.

12.2 The surahs and their names

The Arabic word *sūrah* occurs ten times in the Qur'an – nine times in the singular and once in the plural, *suwar*. The sending down of a *sūrah*, or the anticipation of one being sent down, is an occasion for the unbelievers and hypocrites to engage in mockery (9.64, 124, 127); those who are in doubt about what Allah has sent down on his servant are challenged to bring 'a *sūrah* like it' (2.23; 10.38) or 'ten *suwar* like it' (11.13); the believers say 'if only a *sūrah* were sent down!', but when a decisive *sūrah*

is sent down which mentions fighting, those in whose hearts is a disease look faint (47.20 *bis*); and when a *sūrah* is sent down urging belief in Allah and waging war alongside his Messenger, influential people seek exemption (9.86). From these passages it appears that *sūrah* is a technical term for a portion of the revelation vouchsafed to Muhammad. It is unclear whether or not the surahs mentioned in these passages correspond to surahs as we know them, although there is one further passage which suggests that they do: the opening of Surah 24 which begins 'A *sūrah* which We have sent down ...' (24.1).

Arab lexicographers and Qur'anic commentators are uncertain about the precise meaning of the word.[1] Some derive it from the verb *sa'ira*, meaning 'to be left over'. Hence they understand the surahs to be pieces of the Qur'an, what is left when it is divided up. Others link it with the verb *sāra* meaning 'to climb a wall', but disagree as to whether the core idea is therefore that of 'surrounding' or 'elevation'. In the former case, a surah is thought of as surrounding the varieties of knowledge which it contains rather like a wall which encloses a city. In the latter, what is emphasized is the elevation of the reader, who is raised to one level of knowledge and dignity after another as he reads through the Qur'an surah by surah. Whatever we make of these interpretations, one thing is absolutely clear: when it refers to a text, the word surah is specific to the Qur'an and is never used of the chapter of a book. Hence to translate *sūrah* as 'chapter' is to invite confusion.

The difference between surahs and chapters was put succinctly by the eighteenth-century Indian theologian Shāh Walī-Allāh of Delhi, when he wrote that the Qur'an should not be thought of as a book arranged in chapters and dealing with its subject systematically, but rather as a collection of epistles by a king, each written for his subjects according to the requirements of the situation.[2] The comparison of surahs with epistles is a highly suggestive one which is worth exploring further, particularly by those who are familiar with the epistles of St Paul. We shall see later that it apparently throws light on the order in which the surahs occur. In addition it helps prepare the reader for many of the themes and motifs to be repeated in surah after surah, but with subtle modifications to fit the different circumstances of the recipients of the message.[3]

So much for the surahs, but what are we to make of the names by which they are known? Although they are hallowed by tradition and may have originated in the time of the Prophet, they are not actually part of the Qur'an. Moreover, some surahs are known by more than one name.[4] For example, Surah 9 is known as 'Repentance' and 'Immunity'; and Surah 17

is known as 'The Night Journey' and 'The Children of Israel'. The principal function of the surah names is as convenient labels for identifying the surahs and for distinguishing them from one another. Often, the name is derived from a word which occurs in the first two āyahs: either the very first word (e.g. Surah 50, 'Qāf'); a key word (e.g. Surah 54, 'The Moon'); the first āyah in its entirety (e.g. Surah 55, 'The All-merciful'); or the last word of the first āyah, especially if it establishes a rhyme (e.g. Surah 90, 'The Land'). In other instances, the name is a word which occurs elsewhere in the surah, but is rare in the Qur'an as a whole. This is the case with Surah 2, 'the Cow', as explained in Chapter 10. In a few instances, the name does give some indication of a surah's contents: for example of Surah 4, 'Women'. Even here, however, the name is not the equivalent of a chapter heading, because although the surah contains legislation concerning women, it contains much else besides this; moreover, there is important legislation on this subject in other surahs such as Surah 2, 'The Cow', and Surah 24, 'Light'. The same holds true with surahs which bear the names of prophets; for instance Abraham and Noah feature in many other surahs besides Surah 14 and Surah 71, which are named after them. The only exception is Surah 12, 'Joseph', which is almost entirely devoted to the story of Joseph, who is mentioned elsewhere only briefly at 6.84 and 40.34.

12.3 The decreasing-length rule: alleged precedents and parallels

Nöldeke and Schwally state that the principle of arranging the surahs in order of decreasing length is not as extraordinary as it might at first seem, because if one were arranging the sections of a book in accordance with their size it would be just as reasonable to begin with the long ones as with the short ones. They claim that an investigation of world literature would probably reveal that both procedures are equally common.[5] This rather begs the question, because it assumes that Europeans find it normal for the sections of a book to be arranged in accordance with their size, and that the only thing which has to be explained is why the long surahs come first and not the short ones. Moreover, despite the sweeping claims about world literature, they only offer one example: the sequence of the tractates within each division of the Jewish Mishnah. This is a poor analogy, because the Mishnah is a highly systematic work, its tractates do not vary in length nearly as much as the surahs do, none of the divisions contains more than twelve tractates, and the decreasing-length rule is only strictly applied in four divisions out of six.[6]

Instead of the Mishnah, Sergio Noja points to early collections of Arabic poetry. He states that it was standard practice for compilers of such collections to put the longest poems first, then the shorter ones, leaving fragments of lost or unfinished poems until the end. He suggests that, in view of this precedent, the editors of the Qur'an would have found it natural to do the same with the surahs.[7] There are at least three problems with this suggestion. First, since the Qur'an contains emphatic denials that it is the work of a poet,[8] it is hardly likely that Muhammad or any subsequent editor would have wished it to resemble a collection of poetry. Second, although it is true that major pieces were sometimes put at the beginning of such collections, and fragments put at the end, the principal criterion governing the arrangement of the poems was not length but rhyme: those rhyming in *hamza* coming first, then those rhyming in *bā'*, *tā'*, *thā* and so on, in alphabetical order. From what was said in Chapter 1, it should be clear that the distribution of rhymes in the Qur'an is entirely different. Third, in all probability, the compilation of the earliest collections of pre-Islamic poetry occurred too late for them to have had an influence on the editing of the Qur'an.[9] However, Noja insists that the editorial method of putting major pieces first, then shorter ones followed by fragments, is neither unique to the Arabs nor odd. Moreover, he cites a modern parallel from an entirely different culture: Grigori Alexandrov's editing of Eisenstein's incomplete film *Qué viva Mexico*.[10] This parallel is certainly intriguing, but in view of the difference in genre it should not be given too much weight.

In the opinion of the present writer, the best example of an ancient text in which the sections are arranged in order of decreasing length is the collection of Pauline epistles embedded in the New Testament. Romans, which heads the collection, is over thirteen times as long as Philemon, which concludes it. The canonical order is:

> Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon.

If the decreasing-length rule were applied strictly the order would be:

> Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, I Timothy, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Timothy, II Thessalonians, Titus, Philemon.

Thus the only epistles which are not in the position one would expect are I and II Timothy. These exceptions to the rule can be accounted for on

the supposition that the final editors did not wish to separate I and II Thessalonians, because they were addressed to the same community, and that they did not wish to separate I Timothy, II Timothy and Titus, because they already constituted a discrete collection of 'pastoral' correspondence addressed to individuals. The analogy with the Qur'an is far from perfect, because there are only thirteen epistles as compared with one hundred and fourteen surahs. Nor do I wish to suggest that the editors of the Qur'an were influenced by the Pauline corpus. However, it is striking that in both cases the person or persons responsible for editing the material chose to ignore the chronological order in which it had been composed. Moreover, in Section 3, we shall see the relevance of the fact that Paul's editors relaxed the decreasing-length rule in order to incorporate earlier collections.

12.4 Explaining the exceptions to the decreasing-length rule

Closer examination reveals that it is an oversimplification to state that the surahs are arranged in order of decreasing length. The obvious exception is Surah 1, the *fātiḥah*, which, with only six lines of Arabic text,[11] would come around 94th if its length were the only criterion. Another glaring exception is Surah 8 which, with only 149 lines, is far too short for its present position and should come 20th. Yet these are only the tip of the iceberg. For if the decreasing-length rule had been applied strictly, Surahs 1 to 9 would have been put in the order: 2 (715 lines), 4 (445 lines), 3 (409 lines), 7 (398 lines), 6 (358 lines), 5 (332 lines), 9 (301 lines), ... 8 (149 lines), ... 1 (6 lines). Nor is the situation much better with the medium-length surahs. Surahs 13, 14 and 30 (each with 99 lines) should by rights come 34th to 36th, Surah 15 (85 lines) should come 40th, Surah 32 (46 lines) should come 51st, Surah 33 (158 lines) should come 18th, Surah 40 (145 lines) should come 22nd, Surah 62 (22 lines) should come 79th; and there are no less than seventeen further surahs which are ten or more places out. Finally, the rule is not strictly observed even with the very short surahs at the end of the corpus. The shortest surah is not Surah 114, which has twenty words, but Surah 108, which has only ten. If the last twelve surahs were arranged in order of decreasing length based on word count,[12] the sequence would be: 102 (28 words), 109 (26 words), 107 (25 words), 105 (23 words), 111 (23 words), 113 (23 words), 114 (20 words), 110 (19 words), 106 (17 words), 112 (15 words), 103 (14 words), 108 (10 words).

Non-Muslim scholars have exercised their ingenuity in trying to

explain these discrepancies. Allowance may reasonably be made for the *fātiḥah* and Surahs 113–114, on the grounds that they are prayers which frame the whole corpus,[13] but the explanations given for the other exceptions to the rule are more problematical and require careful examination. The principal mitigating factor is allegedly the presence of blocks of surahs each beginning with the same 'detached letters'. It is argued that these blocks represent earlier collections of surahs, and that the final editors were reluctant to break them up. The relevant information is set out in the following table, where the figure in the first column indicates the position of the surah in the canonical sequence, the bracketed figure in the second column indicates the position it would have if the decreasing-length rule were strictly applied, the letters in the third column are those with which the surah begins, and the figure in the fourth column indicates the length of the surah in lines. In the fifth column, I have noted whether the surah is generally considered Meccan or Madīnan. (In the case of Surah 13, the word Meccan is followed by a question mark because Nöldeke regarded it as Meccan, but in the standard Egyptian edition it is classified as Madīnan).

2	(1)	'LM	715	Madīnan
3	(3)	'LM	409	Madīnan
7	(4)	'LMṢ	398	Meccan
10	(10)	'LR	215	Meccan
11	(8)	'LR	221	Meccan
12	(11)	'LR	209	Meccan
13	(34)	'LMR	99	Meccan?
14	(35)	'LR	99	Meccan
15	(40)	'LR	85	Meccan
19	(28)	KHY'Ṣ	114	Meccan
20	(17)	ṬH	159	Meccan
26	(14)	ṬSM	169	Meccan
27	(24)	ṬS	137	Meccan
28	(15)	ṬSM	168	Meccan
29	(25)	'LM	129	Meccan
30	(33)	'LM	99	Meccan
31	(45)	'LM	62	Meccan
32	(51)	'LM	46	Meccan
36	(38)	YS	90	Meccan
38	(39)	Ṣ	90	Meccan
40	(22)	ḤM	145	Meccan

41	(37)	ḤM	94	Meccan
42	(32)	ḤM'SQ	100	Meccan
43	(30)	ḤM	104	Meccan
44	(52)	ḤM	46	Meccan
45	(46)	ḤM	59	Meccan
46	(41)	ḤM	75	Meccan
50	(53)	Q	46	Meccan
68	(61)	N	40	Meccan

From this table, it is clear that the 'LR surahs (including one which begins 'LMR) form a single block, the ṬS and ṬSM surahs form a second block, and the ḤM surahs (including one which begins ḤM'SQ) form a third. However, the eight 'LM surahs (including Surah 7 which begins 'LMS, and Surah 13 which begins 'LMR) are split into a consecutive pair, two isolated surahs (one of which is embedded in another block!) and a block of four. Furthermore, within the ṬS-ṬSM block and the HM block the descending-length rule is not followed strictly, whereas in the other blocks it is. This might explain some of the exceptions to the decreasing-length rule in the overall arrangement of the Qur'an:

(i) If the two long 'LM surahs, Surah 2 and Surah 3, were already linked in some way, this would explain why Surah 4 was not placed immediately after Surah 2 despite being longer than Surah 3.

(ii) If the 'LR-'LMR surahs, Surahs 10–15, already constitute a small collection, this would explain why Surahs 13, 14 and 15 occur much earlier than one would otherwise expect; for they were kept together with Surahs 10, 11 and 12 which were inserted more or less in the right position.

(iii) If the main block of 'LM surahs, Surahs 29–32, already constituted a small collection, this would explain why Surahs 31 and 32 occur much earlier than one would otherwise expect; for they were kept together with Surahs 29 and 30, which were inserted more or less in the right position.

(iv) If the ḤM surahs, Surahs 40–46, already constituted a small collection, this would explain why Surah 40 occurs much later than one would otherwise expect; for it was kept together with Surahs 41–45, which are all considerably shorter and are inserted more or less in the right position.

On this hypothesis, however, a number of things would still remain unexplained:

1. Why are Surahs 5, 6 and 7 not in the reverse order?
2. Why does Surah 8 occur twelve places earlier than expected?[14]
3. Since Surah 33 (158 lines) is noticeably longer than Surah 29 (129 lines), why does it not occur before the 'LM block, Surahs 29–32, rather than after it?
4. Why does Surah 62 not come much later?
5. Leaving aside the positions of Surah 113 and Surah 114, which have been accounted for, why are many of the short surahs near the end of the corpus not in their correct place?
6. Why are there seventeen further surahs which are ten or more places out?

In reply, it might be argued that the decreasing-length rule was followed loosely, and on the basis of the number of sheets that each surah filled rather than on the basis of the number of lines of text.[15] This, together with the effect of the incorporation of pre-existing collections, could answer question 6. It might also provide an answer to question 5, although I am less convinced of this, because those who knew the short surahs by heart would surely have been aware of their relative length. In any case we are left without any satisfactory answer to questions 1, 2, 3 and 4.

12.5 The alleged order of the surahs in the manuscripts of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy

In considering the exceptions to the decreasing-length rule in the canonical order of the surahs, there is one further piece of evidence which has to be taken into account. Nobody pretends that it solves all the problems, but it is thought by some to shed light on the way in which the editors of the Qur'an set about their work. Around CE 988, a bibliophile called Ibn an-Nadīm, who had some connection with Baghdad but was at that time living in Constantinople, compiled a remarkable work called the *Fihrist*. This is a catalogue of all the extant books in the Arabic language together with details about their authors. In it, Ibn an-Nadīm mentions two manuscripts of the Qur'an attributed to 'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd and Ubayy b. Ka'b, who were well-known Companions of the Prophet. Furthermore, he lists the order in which the surahs occurred in these manuscripts, and in both cases it differs from the canonical order. In the manuscript attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd there were allegedly a hundred and ten surahs arranged in the following order:

2, 4, 3, 7, 6, 5, 10, 9, 16, 11, 12, 17, 21, 23, 26, 37, 33, 28, 24, 8, 19, 29,

30, 36, 25, 22, 13, 34, 35, 14, 38, 47, 31, 39, 40, 43, 41, 46, 45, 44, 48, 57, 59, 32, 50, 65, 49, 67, 64, 63, 62, 61, 72, 71, 58, 60, 66, 55, 53, 51, 52, 54, 69, 56, 68, 79, 70, 74, 73, 83, 80, 76, 75, 77, 78, 81, 82, 88, 87, 92, 89, 85, 84, 96, 90, 93, 94, 86, 100, 107, 101, 98, 91, 95, 104, 105, 106, 102, 97, 110, 108, 109, 111, 112.[16]

Note that, in fact, only a hundred and four surahs are included and that as Ibn an-Nadīm gives only their opening words or names – not their numbers – their identification in one or two cases is uncertain. What is striking about this list, however, is that with the exception of the ḤM surahs (which are given in a different order), the surahs with detached letters are not grouped together. They have apparently been separated in the interests of following the decreasing-length rule more strictly. Moreover, the embarrassingly short *fātiḥah* has been left out; the sequence begins with Surahs 2, 4, 3, 7, 6 and 5, just as it should do if length is all that counts; Surah 8 is also precisely where it should be, in 20th position; and Surah 33 is around about the right place in 17th. Nevertheless, the decreasing-length rule is still not followed perfectly. For instance, Surah 14, which should come 35th, actually comes 30th; Surah 32, which should come 51st, is actually 44th; Surah 40, which should come 22nd, is 35th; and Surah 62, which should come 79th, is 51st.

In the manuscript attributed to Ubayy, there were allegedly a hundred and sixteen surahs arranged in the following order:

1, 2, 4, 3, 6, 7, 5, 10, 8, 9, 11, 19, 26, 22, 12, 18, 16, 33, 17, 39, 45, 20, 21, 24, 23, 40, 13, 28, 27, 37, 38, 36, 15, 42, 30, 43, 41, 14, 35, 48, 47, 57, 52, 25, 32, 71, 46, 50, 55, 56, 72, 53, 68, 69, 59, 60, 77, 78, 76, 75, 81, 79, 80, 83, 84, 95, 96, 49, 63, 62, 66, 89, 67, 92, 82, 91, 85, 86, 87, 88, 74?, 98?, 61, 93, 94, 101, 102, 65?, 104, 99, 100, 105, ?, 108, 97, 109, 110, 111, 106, 112, 113, 114.[17]

Once again there is a discrepancy, for only a hundred and two surahs are actually listed. All the groups of surahs beginning with detached letters have been dispersed, including the ḤM group. As in the canonical order, the *fātiḥah* comes at the beginning and Surah 8 comes far too early, but in other ways the decreasing-length rule is followed more accurately. For instance, Surah 4 follows Surah 2 as it should do; Surah 13, which should come 34th, actually comes 27th; Surah 14, which should come 35th, comes 38th; Surah 15, which should come 40th, comes 33rd; Surah 32, which should come 51st, comes 45th; Surah 40, which should come 22nd, comes 26th; and Surah 62, which should come 79th, comes 70th.

Nöldeke and Schwally assume that the collections of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy predated the canonical edition of the Qur'an. They argue that since both Companions clearly attempted to put the surahs in order of decreasing length, this confirms that the official editors were working on the same principle, except of course that the latter kept intact the blocks of surahs beginning with the detached letters. They further maintain that since neither the official editors, nor Ibn Mas'ūd, nor Ubayy succeeded in applying the decreasing-length rule strictly, this confirms that in all three editions the length of surahs was estimated on the basis of the number of sheets they filled, rather than on an accurate line-count or word-count.[18] This seems to me to overstretch the evidence. Ibn an-Nadīm was writing over three and a half centuries after the death of the Prophet, and he did not claim that he himself had seen the two manuscripts in question. He had, he asserts, seen

> a number of Qur'anic manuscripts which the transcribers recorded as manuscripts of Ibn Mas'ūd.

But he adds that no two of them were in agreement and that most of them were on badly effaced parchment. The information which he gives about the order of the surahs was not based on these manuscripts but on a statement by an eighth-century writer called al-Faḍl b. Shāhdhān, whose work is no longer extant. The information about the manuscript of Ubayy, on the other hand, is based on the eyewitness evidence of an informer whose identity Ibn al-Nadīm carefully concealed:

> One of our reliable friends has informed us, saying that the composition of the surahs according to the reading of Ubayy b. Ka'b is in a village called Qarīyat al-Anṣār, two parasangs from Baṣra, where in his home Muhammad b. Abd-al-Malik al-Anṣārī showed us a Qur'anic manuscript saying, 'This is the copy of Ubayy which we have handed down from our fathers.' I looked into it and ascertained the headings of the surahs, the endings of the revelations and the numbers of āyahs.[19]

On the basis of such weak testimony, it would be rash to conclude that we have any reliable evidence about the order of the surahs in the original manuscripts of Ibn Mas'ūd and Ubayy.[20] All that we can deduce with any certainty from Ibn an-Nadīm's statements is that from the eighth century through to the tenth century, rare Qur'anic manuscripts were known to exist which were attributed to these two Companions and which listed the surahs in a different order. In addition it may reasonably be inferred that

the persons who produced these manuscripts were concerned to arrange the surahs in order of decreasing length.

12.6 The dovetailing of consecutive surahs

There appear to be many instances of a key word or phrase towards the end of one surah recurring near the beginning of the next, a phenomenon which I shall refer to as dovetailing. The following list is probably not exhaustive:

1. Surah 1 ends with the petition 'Guide us (*iHDi-nā*) in the straight path ...' Surah 2 begins with an answer to this prayer ''LM. This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, a guidance (*HuDan*) for the god-fearing.'
2. Some thirty āyahs before the end of Surah 2, a crescendo is reached with the throne verse which opens with the words 'Allah, there is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting' (2.255). This statement is repeated verbatim in 3.2, but nowhere else in the Qur'an. There are also links between the penultimate āyah of Surah 2 and the third āyah of Surah 3, both of which mention the 'sending down' of scriptures (2.285, cf. 3.3).
3. Towards the end of Surah 3, there is a reference to male and female (3.195); the opening āyah of Surah 4 refers to 'men and women' (4.1).
4. The final āyah of Surah 5 begins, 'To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth ...' (5.120); Surah 6 opens with the words 'Praise be to Allah who created the heavens and the earth' (6.1).
5. The final āyah of Surah 9 refers to Allah as 'Lord of the mighty throne' (9.129); near the beginning of Surah 10 there is a reference to him ascending the throne after the creation (10.3).
6. The final āyah of Surah 10 urges the Prophet to be patient 'until Allah judges (*yaḤKuMu*), for He is the best of judges (*ḤāKiMīn*)'; Surah 11 begins with an assertion that the āyahs of the Scripture have been made decisive (*uḤKiMat*) in the presence of One who is All-wise (*ḤaKīM*).
7. Four āyahs before the end of Surah 11, God refers to 'everything which We narrate to thee (*naQuṢṢu 'alay-ka*) of the stories of the messengers' (11.120); The third āyah of Surah 12 begins 'We narrate to thee (*naQuṢṢu 'alay-ka*) the best narrative' (12.3).
8. Towards the end of Surah 15, the Prophet is ordered to shun 'the idolaters' (*al-muSHRiKīn* – literally 'the associators', 15.94) and to

glorify (*SaBbiḤ*) Allah's praise (15.98); the opening āyah of Surah 16 includes the assertion 'Glorified be He (*SuBḤāna-hu*)! High be He exalted above what they associate (*yuSHRiKūn*) with Him.'

9. The final āyah of Surah 17 begins, 'And say "Praise be to Allah who has not taken a son ..."' (17.111); Surah 18 opens with the words 'Praise be to Allah who has sent down the Scripture ...' (18.1), and this is soon followed by a warning for those who say 'Allah has taken a son' (18.4).

10. The final āyah of Surah 22 includes the order to establish prayer and pay compulsory charity (22.78); the same two fundamental duties are mentioned in 23.2–4.

11. The final āyah of Surah 23 reads, 'Say, "My Lord, forgive and show mercy! Thou art the best of the merciful"' (23.118). At first sight, the opening of Surah 24 with its concern with revelation, and the flogging of adulterers and false witnesses, seems not to follow on from this. But then there is a reference to those who repent and reform, and the assertion that Allah is 'Forgiving, All-merciful' (24.5).

12. The final āyah of Surah 24 and the second āyah of Surah 25 contain a reference to the heavens and the earth (24.64; cf. 25.2).

13. The final āyah of Surah 25 ends with a direct address to those who have 'cried lies' (25.77); they are mentioned in 26.6.

14. The final āyah of Surah 27 begins, 'Say, "Praise be to Allah! He will show you his signs ..."'; Surah 28 opens with the words 'ṬSM. These are signs of the clear Scripture ...'

15. At the end of Surah 32 the Prophet is told to shun those who 'disbelieve' (*KaFaRū*); at the beginning of Surah 33 he is told not to obey the 'disbelievers' (*KāFiRīn*) and hypocrites (32.29–30; cf. 33.1).

16. Towards the end of Surah 33 and near the beginning of Surah 34 there are references to the heavens and the earth (33.72; cf. 34.2).

17. Towards the end of Surah 35 we are told concerning the unbelievers and their response to Muhammad's mission, 'They swore to Allah the most earnest oaths, that if a warner (*NaDHīR*) came to them they would be more rightly-guided than any other nation. Then when a warner (*NaDHīR*) came to them it only increased their aversion' (35.42). Near the beginning of Surah 36, Muhammad is told that he is a emissary, 'so that thou mayest warn (*li-tuNDHiRa*) a folk whose forefathers have not been warned (*mā uNDHiRa*)' (36.6).

18. Towards the end of Surah 36 and near the beginning of Surah 37 there are references to the heavens and the earth (36.81; cf. 37.5).

19. Towards the end of Surah 38, Iblis is quoted as having said that he

would pervert all humankind except for 'the sincere' (*al-muKHLiṢīn*) among Allah's 'worshippers' (*'iBāD*) (38.83), to which Allah replied that He was speaking the truth (*al-ḤaQQ*) when He said that He would fill hell with those who followed Iblis (38.84f.). The second āyah of Surah 39 reads, 'We have sent the Scripture down to thee with the truth (*bi 'l-ḤaQQ*), so worship (*fa-'BuD*) Allah, offering Him sincere (*muKHLiṢan*) devotion' (39.2).

20. The final āyah of Surah 39 mentions the angels circling 'around the throne' (*hawli 'l-'arshi* 39.75); the seventh āyah of Surah 40 mentions those who bear 'the throne, and those around it' (*al-'arsha wa-man hawla-hu*, 40.7).

21. Towards the end of Surah 42 and near the beginning of Surah 43 there are references to 'the heavens and the earth' (42.53; cf. 43.9). In addition there are also references to 'the Scripture' (42.52; cf. 43.2).

22. The last two āyahs of Surah 45 contain a double reference to the heavens and the earth, and the surah ends with the assertion that Allah is the All-mighty the All-wise (45.36f.); the opening āyahs of Surah 46 contain a similar double reference and the same divine names (Surah 46.2–4).

23. Towards the end of Surah 46 we are told that when 'those who disbelieve' face the hellfire whose existence they denied during their lifetime, they will be taunted with the words 'Is this not real? (literally "the truth", *al-ḤaQQ*', 46.34). At the beginning of Surah 47, 'those who disbelieve' are again mentioned (47.1, cf. 2) and the message vouchsafed to Muhammad is characterized as 'the truth' (*al-ḤaQQ*) (47.1, cf. 2).

24. The final āyah of Surah 48 culminates in Allah's promise of 'forgiveness and a mighty reward' to those who believe and perform honorable deeds (48.29); near the beginning of Surah 49 exactly the same promise is made concerning those whose hearts Allah examines (49.3).

25. The final āyah of Surah 51 states 'So woe (*fa-waylun*) to the unbelievers, for that day of theirs that they are promised' (51.60). The coming 'day' of judgment is referred to again in 52.9 and the words 'So woe' (*fa-waylun*) recur at 52.11.

26. The final āyah of Surah 52 ends with the command to laud Allah at 'the retreating of the stars' (52.49); Surah 53 begins with an oath 'By the star when it sets' (53.1).

27. The final āyah of Surah 56 reads, 'So laud thy Lord's mighty name' (56.96); Surah 57 begins, 'Whatever is in the heavens and the earth lauds Allah ...' (57.1).

28. Towards the end of Surah 66 it is stated that the refuge of the disbelievers and hypocrites will be hell (*jahannam*) with the comment 'a wretched destination!' (*wa-bi'sa 'l-maṣīr*, 66.9). Near the beginning of Surah 67 the same word is used to denote hell and the same comment is made (67.6).
29. Towards the end of Surah 75 and near the beginning of Surah 76 there are references to man being created from 'a drop of semen' (75.37; cf. 76.2).
30. In the last āyah of Surah 109, the Messenger is instructed to say to the unbelievers, 'To you your religion (*dīnu-kum*) and to me my religion (*dīn-ī*) (109.3). In Surah 110, he is instructed what to do when he sees people entering 'Allah's religion' (*dīni 'Ilāhi*) in droves (110.2).

As the Qur'an is repetitive, and the beginnings and endings of many surahs have a similar liturgical ring, the links established by these verbal echoes may not seem particularly strong at first sight. For instance the word 'throne' (*'arsh*) which links the beginning of Surah 10 with the end of Surah 9 also occurs near the beginning of three other surahs (cf. 20.5; 32.4; 57.4). If the presence of the same key word or catch phrase were the only criterion, one could therefore justify interchanging Surah 10 and any one of these three. However, this could not be done without violating the decreasing-length rule. More telling still, the above list includes no less than six pairs of surahs linked by references to 'the heavens and the earth': Surah 5–6; 24–25; 33–34; 36–37; 42–43; 45–46. There is, however, no way one could reshuffle these twelve surahs on the basis of dovetailing which would leave the ḤM group intact and produce a better gradation in accordance with the decreasing-length rule. This leads me to suspect that none of the apparent verbal echoes which I have listed is fortuitous and that dovetailing played a part in the editorial process.

12.7 Conclusion

We have established that the names of the surahs are simply convenient labels for distinguishing one surah from another, and that unlike chapter headings they rarely indicate the principal subject-matter dealt with in the surahs themselves. Nor should the surahs be thought of as the chapters of a book, each dealing systematically with one aspect of the main subject. To use Shah Walī-Allāh's analogy, they are more like a collection of epistles by a king, which often have the same themes but which

nonetheless differ from one another because they were composed at different times and for different situations.

The analogy with a collection of epistles also throws light on the canonical order of the surahs. Like the Pauline epistles in the New Testament, the surahs seem to have been arranged approximately in order of decreasing length. Moreover, just as Paul's editors waived the decreasing-length rule on occasions in order to avoid breaking up three earlier collections (the Corinthian correspondence, the Thessalonian correspondence and the Pastoral Epistles), the editor or editors of the Qur'an seem likewise to have waived the rule in order to avoid separating surahs which begin with the same detached letters. In the case of the Qur'an, however, there are a number of glaring exceptions to the decreasing-length rule which cannot be accounted for in this way. Furthermore, the editors have not always kept together all the surahs which begin with the same letters. It would therefore seem that although the relative length of a surah and the presence or absence of detached letters at the beginning of that surah influenced the position it was assigned in the corpus, additional factors were taken into account.

The issue is further complicated by the tradition that two Companions of the Prophet, 'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd and Ubayy b. Ka'b, possessed manuscripts of the Qur'an in which the surahs were arranged in a different order. We cannot be certain that this tradition is reliable, but it does furnish evidence that between the eighth and tenth centuries there existed rare manuscripts attributed to these Companions, and that the compilers of these manuscripts applied the decreasing-length rule more strictly and made no attempt to keep together surahs beginning with the same detached letters.

Finally, we noted thirty instances in which pairs of consecutive surahs were dovetailed together by the repetition of a key word or phrase. Dovetailing would occur much less frequently if the surahs were arranged in the order allegedly favoured by Ibn Mas'ūd or Ubayy.[21] This suggests that the editorial process followed by the canonical editors was more sophisticated than that followed by the compilers of these manuscripts.

13

The Order of the Surahs: Iṣlāḥī's Explanation

13.1 Introduction

In the course of the previous chapter, we saw that although the surahs occur approximately in order of decreasing length, this is far from being a hard and fast rule. We also saw that by no means all the exceptions to the decreasing-length rule could be explained in terms of the editor's desire to group together surahs which begin with the same detached letters. These findings, together with the observation that consecutive surahs are often dovetailed together by the repetition of a key word or phrase, raise the possibility that the content of the surahs had a bearing on the position they were assigned in the corpus. In this century, a number of scholars from India and Pakistan have argued that that was indeed the case. The founding father of this school of thought was Hamīd ad-dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī (1863–1930), but his distinguished pupil Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī was the first person to give a detailed explanation of why all 114 surahs occur in the order they do.[1] In this chapter, I shall attempt to summarize and evaluate his approach.

13.2 Summary of Iṣlāḥī's views

Iṣlāḥī holds that the Qur'an comprises seven groups of surahs, and that each group contains a block of Meccan material followed by a block of Madīnan material. The seven groups are as follows:

G. 1 Surahs 1–5 (Surah 1 Meccan, Surahs 2–5 Madīnan)
G. 2 Surahs 6–9 (Surahs 6–7 Meccan, Surahs 8–9 Madīnan)
G. 3 Surahs 10–24 (Surahs 10–23 Meccan, Surah 24 Madīnan)
G. 4 Surahs 25–33 (Surahs 25–32 Meccan, Surah 33 Madīnan)
G. 5 Surahs 34–49 (Surahs 34–46 Meccan, Surahs 47–49 Madīnan)
G. 6 Surahs 50–66 (Surahs 50–56 Meccan, Surahs 57–66 Madīnan)
G. 7 Surahs 67–114 (Surahs 67–109 Meccan, Surahs 110–114 Madīnan).[2]

In agreement with Farāhī, he considers that each surah has a distinct theme around which all the āyahs revolve. He refers to this distinct theme as the *'amūd* or 'pillar'. The process of identifying the *'amūd* of a given surah is often slow and arduous. First, the surah is divided into sections on the basis of changes of theme. Then, each section is studied in turn until an idea emerges which seems to unite all the āyahs contained in it. Finally, the commentator endeavours to discover the distinctive theme which unites the key ideas of the various sections.

Just as each surah has an *'amūd* under which the main ideas of all its sections are subsumed, so too each of the seven groups of surahs has an *'amūd* which unites the *'amūds* of its constituent surahs. The *'amūds* of the seven groups are as follows:

G. 1 The *Sharī'ah* or Law;
G. 2 Abrahamic Religion;
G. 3 The Struggle between Truth and Falsehood and the Divine Law concerning it;
G. 4 Proof of Messenger Status (*risālah*);
G. 5 The Unity of God;
G. 6 The Hereafter;
G. 7 Warning to the Unbelievers.

The reason why the groups invariably contain a Meccan block followed by a Madīnan block is that each of the seven groups recapitulates the history of the Islamic movement while majoring on a different theme. The Madīnan surahs in a given group thus spell out the practical implications of the theoretical teaching enunciated in the Meccan surahs.

Apart from Surah 1 (which serves as an introduction to both G. 1 and the whole corpus), Surah 24 (which is a supplement to Surah 23), and Surah 33 (which is a supplement to the whole of G. 4), most of the surahs are arranged in complementary pairs. Thus Surah 2 is paired with Surah 3; Surah 4 with Surah 5; Surah 6 with Surah 7; and so on. A pair of surahs may complement one another in various ways: the one may state a theme briefly and the other deal with it in detail; the one may state an important principle and the other illustrate it; the one may state a premise and the other the conclusion to be drawn from it; the two may emphasize different aspects of the same theme; the two may give different types of evidence to support the same thesis; or they may represent the unity of opposites, by dealing respectively with the positive and negative aspects of the same theme.[3]

Iṣlāḥī alleges that the seven groups of surahs are referred to in the

Qur'an itself, where they are designated 'seven *min al-mathānī*' (15.87; cf. 39.23), an expression which he takes to mean 'seven [groups] made up of those arranged in pairs'. He further alleges that the existence of the seven groups is sanctioned by the Prophetic hadīth which states that the Qur'an was revealed 'in accordance with seven *aḥruf*', and he points out that in the ritual prayer the Prophet used to recite certain surahs as pairs, including Surahs 61 and 62, Surahs 75 and 76, and Surahs 87 and 88.

13.3 Iṣlāḥī's analysis of Surahs 50–66

Before attempting a critical appraisal of Iṣlāḥī's views, I propose to illustrate them by examining his analysis of what he considers to be the sixth group: Surahs 50–66. As we have seen already, the group comprises a block of seven Meccan surahs followed by a block of ten Madīnan surahs, and the *'amūd* of the group is the hereafter.

We learn from the opening āyahs of Surah 50 that the unbelievers were denying that God could raise them to life after they had died and become dust (50.1–3). The *'amūd* of the surah is the examination and refutation of the objection that the hereafter is a theoretical impossibility. The surah offers various proofs of God's power to raise the dead, including the way in which He revives the dead countryside (50.11), and it describes what will happen when the last trumpet is blown (50.20–35). Surah 51 begins with the assertion that what is promised is true and that the recompense (*dīn*) will take place (51.1–6). The surah explains that the purpose of the hereafter is to recompense human beings for their good and evil deeds (51.12–19). It includes stories about how God punished immoral peoples in the past but rescued the believers (51.24–46). As we saw in the previous chapter, Surah 52 is dovetailed to Surah 51 by the woe pronounced against the unbelievers (52.9; cf. 51.60). It is devoted to the same theme as that surah, but dwells more specifically on the retributive aspect of recompense (see especially 52.14, 16, 19, 21, 27). Surah 53 is dovetailed to Surah 52 by the reference to the setting star (53.1; cf. 52.49). It takes up and refutes two of the errors of the unbelievers which were mentioned in Surah 52: their allegation that Muhammad had composed the revelations (53.2–18; cf. 52.33) and their claim that Allah had daughters (53.19–28; cf. 52.39). Its *'amūd* is the denial of the notion that on the Day of Recompense any kind of intercessor will subvert divine justice (see especially 53.26, 38). In Surah 54 the stories of Noah, 'Ād, Thamūd and Lot – which were mentioned briefly in the previous surah – are told at length (54.9–40; cf. 53.50–54). The surah as a whole points to history as

furnishing all the signs that the sceptics could wish for. Surah 55 adds signs from nature and the human existential situation. Surah 56 does not introduce any new themes but recapitulates some of the main points made in Surahs 50–55.

Although Surah 57 is the first of the Madīnan block, it is dovetailed to Surah 56 by a reference to the glorification of God (57.1; cf. 56.96). It is also linked to it in a more subtle way, for whereas Surah 56 indicates that there will be a distinction in the hereafter between the ordinary believers and 'the outstrippers' (*as-sābiqūn*), who will be closer to God (56.10–40), the principal theme of Surah 57 is the exhortation to the believers, and more particularly the hypocrites, to amend their ways and become exemplary Muslims (see especially 57.7–11). Surah 57 thus makes clear what being 'an outstripper' entails, without actually repeating the technical term. Similarly, Surah 58 describes the comportment of 'the hypocrites', who are merely named in 57.13, and gives instructions to Muslims on how to deal with them (see especially 58.8–10, 14–17, 22). In addition, the idea is sown that in the end victory belongs to God and his prophets, and that their opponents are destined to defeat (58.22). Surah 59 illustrates this 'germ idea' with reference to recent events: the expulsion of the Jewish tribe of the Banū an-Naḍīr (especially 59.2–6). It briefly mentions the poor emigrants as one of the categories who should benefit from the seizure of their property (59.8). Surah 60 deals with the Meccans, who posed an even more serious threat than the Banū an-Naḍīr. The emigrants are to sever all links with them, following the example of Abraham, who abandoned even his own blood relations because of their unbelief (60.1–6). Those who refuse to do so are acting hypocritically (60.13).

Surah 61 is an address to the Muslims, urging them to abandon hypocrisy and obey the Prophet. They are to follow the example of those disciples of Jesus who accepted his call to fight as helpers in God's cause. Surahs 61 and 62 resemble each other in that they both refer to earlier prophecies concerning the sending of Muhammad: 61.6 mentions Jesus' foretelling the advent of a messenger whose name would be Aḥmad, and 62.2 alludes to the prayer of Abraham and Ishmael for a messenger from among their own people (cf. 3.129). Moreover, whereas 61.11 explicitly urges belief in Allah and His Messenger and striving in His way with one's property and person, 62.11 mentions the hypocrites doing the opposite of that – by leaving the congregational prayer in pursuit of trade or diversion, while Muhammad was still standing preaching. Surah 63 starts abruptly, because it is a supplement to Surah 62 and describes in

detail the character of those hypocrites. It ends with a warning that love of wealth and progeny leads to ignoring the hereafter (63.9–11). This 'germ idea' becomes the theme of Surah 64 (see especially 64.14–16). Finally, 64.9 furnishes the 'germ idea' for Surahs 65 and 66. This āyah states that at the Judgment God will remit the misdeeds of those who believe and do good works, and that He will admit them to gardens. Surah 65, which begins 'O Prophet', gives instruction on how to observe God's limits (*ḥudūd*, 65.1) in a relationship of hostility to others. Those who heed God will have their misdeeds remitted (65.5); those who believe and do good works will be admitted to gardens (65.11). Surah 66, which also begins 'O Prophet', gives instruction on how to observe God's limits in a relationship of love. It, too, speaks of God's remitting evil deeds and admitting believers to gardens (66.8).

Iṣlāḥī seems to have had some difficulty pairing the surahs of this group. In the Meccan block, Surah 50 forms a pair with Surah 51, Surah 52 forms a pair with Surah 53, and Surah 54 forms a pair with Surah 55, but Surah 56 is unpaired and summarizes the content of Surahs 50–55. In the Madīnan block, Surah 57 is unpaired, Surah 58 and Surah 59 form a pair in which a principle is first stated and then illustrated, Surah 60 is unpaired, Surah 61 forms a pair with Surah 62 to which Surah 63 is a supplement, Surah 64 forms a pair with Surah 65, and Surah 66 may either be regarded as a supplement to Surah 65 or paired with it to represent the unity of opposites.

13.4 Evaluation of Iṣlāḥī's approach

Crucial to Iṣlāḥī's argument is the presence in the Qur'an of alternating blocks of Meccan and Madīnan material. From the table at the beginning of Section 2, the existence of these blocks seems self-evident. We saw in Chapters 4 and 5, however, that although there is a broad consensus concerning which surahs are Meccan and which are Madīnan, there is considerable doubt about some of them. In fact, in the headings of the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur'an, six of the surahs which Iṣlāḥī treats as Meccan (Surahs 13; 22; 55; 76; 98 and 99) are classified as Madīnan, and two which he treats as Madīnan (Surahs 111 and 112) are classified as Meccan. He may well be correct about Surahs 55; 76 and 99, for most non-Muslim scholars and some Muslim commentators regard them as Meccan because of their affinity with other surahs of that period. In the case of Surahs 13; 22; 98; 111 and 112 the arguments are much more finely balanced.[4] We shall soon see, however, that his case would not be

seriously damaged if he were wrong about one or more of the surahs in question.

The only groups that are affected by the problems involved in dating the surahs are G. 3, G. 6 and G. 7. In G. 3, even if Surah 13 and Surah 22 were revealed in al-Madīnah – rather than in Mecca as Iṣlāḥī maintains – there is nothing in the former and little in the latter of a practical or legislative nature. Surah 24, the last surah in this group, is on the other hand undoubtedly Madīnan and contains a good deal of legislative material. In G. 6, even if Surah 55 is Madīnan – although I doubt that it is – it contains nothing of legislative or practical import and does not seem out of place in a block of Meccan material. Surahs 57–66, the last surahs in this group, are on the other hand undoubtedly Madīnan. The situation with G. 7 is more complicated. Even if Surah 76 and Surah 99 were revealed in al-Madīnah, they do not seem out of place in a block of Meccan material, but this is not the case with Surah 98, which sounds Madīnan because of its references to the People of the Scripture. Iṣlāḥī argues plausibly, however, that it was revealed towards the end of the Meccan period, by which time the People of the Scripture were already becoming concerned by the way in which the influence of Islam was spreading. A further problem with G. 7 is the absence of a convincing Madīnan block, but I shall argue in the next section that even if Surah 111 and Surah 112 (or for that matter Surah 110, Surah 113 and Surah 114 as well!) were revealed in Mecca, they would have taken on fresh significance in the Madīnan period. In short, regardless of whether Iṣlāḥī's distribution of the surahs between the Meccan and Madīnan periods is correct in every respect, his Meccan blocks do contain material with a predominantly Meccan flavour and his Madīnan blocks (with the exception of Surahs 110–114) are comprised of surahs which are indubitably Madīnan.

We must now enquire whether this pattern of alternating blocks was produced consciously, or whether it simply arose as a by-product of the attempt to arrange the surahs on the basis of other criteria. What is quite clear is that the pattern is not a by-product of applying the decreasing-length rule. Of the seven transitions from Meccan to Madīnan material, one is marked by a disproportionate drop in length (Surah 7 has 398 lines whereas Surah 8 has only 149), and four reverse the decreasing-length trend (Surah 1 has only 6 lines whereas Surah 2 has 715; Surah 23 has only 129 lines whereas Surah 24 has 159; Surah 32 has only 46 lines whereas Surah 33 has 158; Surah 56 has 54 lines whereas Surah 57 has only 70). Similarly, of the six transitions from Madīnan to Meccan material, three are marked by a disproportionate drop in length (Surah 9

has 301 lines whereas Surah 10 has 215; Surah 24 has 159 lines whereas Surah 25 has 109; Surah 33 has 158 lines whereas Surah 34 has 102), and the other four reverse the trend (Surah 5 has only 332 lines whereas Surah 6 has 358; Surah 49 has only 42 lines whereas Surah 50 has 46; Surah 66 has only 31 lines whereas Surah 67 has 40). Indeed, it looks as if, far from being a by-product of applying the decreasing-length rule, the alternation of Meccan and Madīnan material might on the contrary be the root cause of some of the most glaring exceptions to that rule, including the position of Surahs 7, 8 and 33.

Although the presence of alternating blocks of Meccan and Madīnan surahs was not caused by the application of the decreasing-length rule, we must enquire whether it could have arisen through the application of either of the other two editorial criteria which we have identified: the grouping together of surahs which begin with the same series of detached letters, and the 'dovetailing' of adjacent surahs. None of the transitions from Meccan to Madīnan material, or from Madīnan material to Meccan material, is a by-product of the grouping together of surahs with the same detached letters. Nevertheless, eleven of the thirteen transitions are accompanied by dovetailing. Unfortunately, what is much more difficult to determine is whether in all these instances the surahs were arranged in their present order because the beginning of one seemed to echo the end of another, or whether in some cases dovetailing was produced by insertions made after the order of the surahs had already been determined on other grounds. In at least one instance the dovetailing looks secondary, namely the echo of 23.118 in 24.5. It is generally recognized that the harsh punishments for those found guilty of sexual immorality or for bearing false witness which are prescribed in 24.2–4 were revealed to deal with a crisis caused by false accusations made against the Prophet's wife Ayesha. In the heat of the crisis, the exception clause in 24.5 would hardly have been appropriate; it must surely have been revealed later when the crisis was over, and possibly, therefore, after Surah 24 had been linked with Surah 23 for other reasons. Moreover, two of the thirteen transitions are not accompanied by dovetailing. One of these, the transition from Madīnan material to Meccan material caused by the juxtaposition of Surah 49 and Surah 50, is of little significance, because Surah 50 is only marginally longer than Surah 49 and could owe its position to a loose application of the decreasing-length rule. The other is the transition from Meccan material to Madīnan material caused by the juxtaposition of Surah 7 and Surah 8. This is of greater interest because, as we have seen, it involves a flagrant violation of the decreasing-length rule.

So much for the alternating blocks of Meccan and Madīnan material. Let us now examine the evidence for the existence of Iṣlāhī's seven groups of surahs. It must be admitted that these groups are very unequal in length: G. 1 fills about 160 pages, whereas G. 2 fills only 103 pages; G. 3 on the other hand is twice this length, filling 206 pages; G. 4 fills 101 pages, G. 5 fills 126 pages, but G. 6 fills only 65 pages, and G. 7 fills only 74. Nevertheless, despite this inequality, the groups do seem to have clear boundaries. On finishing reading the surahs in one group and beginning those in the next, the reader is conscious of having passed a watershed because there is, in a sense, a new beginning marked by the abrupt transition from Madīnan material to Meccan material. The passage from the Meccan block to the Madīnan block within a given group, on the other hand, is generally much smoother, because the reader is accustomed to thinking of the Meccan and Madīnan periods as consecutive phases in the Prophet's life. Another feature which helps demarcate the groups is the fact that the last surahs in several groups deal with very similar subjects. G. 1, G. 2, and G. 5 end with surahs concerned (among other things) with *jihād*, whereas G. 3, G. 4 and G. 6 end with surahs which contain material concerning the Prophet's domestic situation. Finally, it would appear to be a strength of Iṣlāhī's scheme that his seven groups incorporate the groups of surahs which begin with the same detached letters. For example the ḤM group, Surahs 40–46, is embedded in G. 5, Surahs 34–49.

It is much more difficult to evaluate Iṣlāhī's views on the *'amūds* of surahs and on those of the seven groups. In respect of the former, I share his conviction that the surahs are well-structured wholes, and I have frequently been struck by the brilliance of his observations. Nevertheless, I find his method too intuitive, and would personally be happier with an analysis which paid closer attention to the formal elements of which the sections of surahs are composed. Nor am I always convinced that the *'amūd* which he proposes does justice to all the material in the surah. These are, however, relatively minor criticisms. As regards the *'amūds* of the seven groups, I wish to reserve my judgment until I have carried out a more thorough study of Iṣlāhī's commentary.[5] An obvious difficulty is that the *'amūd* which he proposes for one group is often a theme which also features extensively in surahs assigned to other groups. Take for instance the hereafter, which is the *'amūd* of Group 6. The hereafter is mentioned in the vast majority of the surahs in the Qur'an, beginning with the reference to the Day of Recompense in 1.4 and ending with the threat of blazing fire in 111.3. Iṣlāḥī does not, of course, deny this; his case

rests on the hereafter being the *dominant theme* in Group 6 and *only in that group*. This does in fact seem to be the case. In most of the surahs in G. 1 and G. 2, the reward in store for the believers and the punishment awaiting the unbelievers is a motif which is repeated without being laboured. In the surahs of G. 3, G. 4 and G. 5 we frequently encounter stories of past peoples who rejected their divinely-sent messengers with disastrous consequences in this world and the next. In the surahs of G. 7, the Hereafter is constantly mentioned, but the emphasis is very often on the eschatological preludes and the dire warnings of the approaching catastrophe. It is only in G. 6 that we encounter a whole series of surahs which appear to deal with different aspects of the hereafter, as outlined above in Section 3. Nevertheless, there is still the problem that the hereafter does not feature extensively in all the surahs of G. 6: for example in Surah 59 it is only mentioned in vv.3,17 and 20, and in Surah 60 it is only mentioned in vv.3 and 13. I am reasonably convinced that Iṣlāḥī has detected a coherent progression in the surahs of this group, but I am less sure that he does justice to the surahs in the Madīnan block by supposing that they deal with the practical implications of belief in the hereafter. Surely, that much could legitimately be said about almost all the Madīnan surahs in all seven groups.

There are problems, too, with Iṣlāḥī's claim that the surahs are paired. Even the most casual reader of the Qur'an is likely to notice now and again that two consecutive surahs have much in common. For instance, Surahs 65 and 66 both begin 'O Prophet' and both mention problems caused by Muhammad's wives, and Surahs 113 and 114 both begin, 'Say, I seek refuge with the Lord of ...'. It is therefore quite legitimate to refer to Surahs 65–66 as one pair and Surahs 113–114 as another. It is also true that two adjacent surahs, although ostensibly very different, often seem to complement each other in one of the ways which Iṣlāḥī has indicated. Nevertheless, there are a number of instances where equally good arguments could be given for pairing the surahs differently. Moreover, there are about a dozen surahs which remain unaccounted for in Iṣlāhī's scheme.[6]

The weakest element in Iṣlāhī's thesis is his claim that the existence of the surah pairs and of the seven groups of surahs is sanctioned by tradition. It is true, as he alleges, that the Prophet used to recite certain surahs as pairs in the ritual prayers (for example Surahs 61–62; Surahs 75–76; and Surahs 87–88), but as Mir has pointed out there are many ḥadīths which record that he often used to recite two surahs which do not form a pair in Iṣlāhi's scheme (for example Surahs 21 and 50; Surahs 33 and 88;

or Surahs 62 and 88).[7] Iṣlāḥī claims that the seven groups of surahs are referred to in the Prophet's statement that the Qur'an was revealed 'in accordance with seven *aḥruf*'. It seems likely, however, that this ḥadith originated in discussions about the multiple levels of meaning which could be discovered by interpreters of the Qur'an, and that 'seven' is used to suggest plenitude rather than to indicate a precise number.[8] There are similar problems with Iṣlāḥī's claim that the seven groups are referred to in the Qur'an itself, where they are designated 'seven *min al-mathānī*' (15.87; cf. 39.23), an expression which he takes to mean 'seven [groups] made up of those arranged in pairs'. Here, too, 'seven' may simply indicate plenitude, and hence as mentioned in Chapter 5, this ayāh probably simply alludes to the manifold repetitions present in the Qur'an.[9] Iṣlāḥī is not, however, perturbed by these objections, as he insists that his conviction concerning the existence of the surah pairs and of the seven groups of surahs was prior to and independent of his discovery of an apparent sanction for them in tradition.[10]

3.5 Iṣlāḥī's approach and the exceptions to the decreasing-length rule

Mawlana Iṣlāḥī rejects the theory that the surahs were purposely arranged approximately in order of decreasing length. In his view that theory is patently untrue because it is not born out by the evidence. For this reason he is simply not interested in it. My own position is slightly different. It seems to me that, if one reads the Qur'an through from beginning to end, one cannot help but notice that the surahs do tend to become progressively shorter and shorter. I am therefore particularly interested in the more blatant exceptions to this rule. We saw in the last chapter that some of these exceptions can be explained on the hypothesis that the editor desired to keep together surahs which began with the same detached letters, but that that hypothesis still left some of the exceptions unaccounted for. In particular, I listed five questions which, in my opinion, cried out for an answer. When Iṣlāḥī elaborated his own account of why the surahs are in the order that they are, he seems not to have had these questions in mind. It is therefore of considerable interest to enquire whether or not his work does incidentally and quite unintentionally furnish answers to them.

The first question concerned Surahs 5–7: why do they not occur in the reverse order – Surah 7; Surah 6 and Surah 5 – as required by the decreasing-length rule? In Iṣlāḥī's view Surah 5 (which is Madīnan) is the last surah in Group 1, whereas Surah 6 and Surah 7 (which are Meccan)

are the first surahs in Group 2. The principal theme of G. 1 is the Law, and relations with the People of the Scripture who possess the Law in the form of the Torah. Surah 2 is paired with Surah 3; in the former the relationship with the Jews predominates, whereas in the latter there is greater concern over the relationship with Christians. Section 4 and Section 5 form another pair and deal primarily with factors which make for cohesion in an Islamic society. The principal theme of G. 2 is Islam as the religion of Abraham. This theme was introduced much earlier in 2.135. There, however, it arose because it had a bearing on the relationship between Islam and the older scriptural religions, Judaism and Christianity. In G. 2 its context is the Islamic community's relations with the pagan Quraysh. The tribe of Quraysh, had the custody of the Ka'bah constructed in Mecca by Abraham. Surah 6 accuses them of distorting the religion of Abraham by their idolatry and Surah 7, which is paired with it, warns them of the consequences of rejecting the revelations brought by Muhammad. The accusation must naturally come before the warning.

My second question concerned Surah 8: why does it occur twelve places earlier than might be expected if the surahs were arranged strictly in accordance with decreasing length? In Iṣlāḥī's view, Surah 8 is the third of the four surahs in G. 2, and the first of the Madīnan surahs in that group. The reader will recall that the Madīnan surahs in each group spell out the practical implications of the theoretical teaching enunciated in the Meccan surahs which precede them. Surah 8 is no exception; it instructs the Muslims to prepare for armed confrontation with the Quraysh. It is ideally positioned because it epitomizes the third stage in the escalating hostilities. These hostilities reach a climax in Surah 9 which announces that Allah and His Messenger are no longer bound by the terms of the treaty with the Quraysh, and openly declares war on them.

My third question concerned Surah 33: as it is noticeably longer than Surah 29, why was it not placed before the 'LM block Surahs 29–32, rather than after it? In Iṣlāḥī's view Surah 33, which is Madīnan, is the last surah in G. 4. All the other surahs in the group are Meccan and must therefore precede it. Moreover, the *'amūd* of G. 4 is 'Proof of Messenger Status' and the reader may recollect from Chapter 11.7 that this surah contains some of the most important statements about the status of Muhammad (e.g. 33.6, 40 and 56), which make it ideal for concluding such a group.

My fourth question concerned Surah 62: in view of its relative brevity, why does it not come much later? The answer to this question has already

been given in Section 2, where Iṣlāḥī's explanation of how Surah 62 and Surah 61 form a pair was summarized.

My fifth question concerned the short surahs near the end of the corpus: why are they not in the strict order required by the decreasing-length rule? Let us consider the last twelve surahs. In Iṣlāḥī's view, these belong to G. 7, whose *'amūd* is 'Warning to the Unbelievers'. Surah 102, which gives warning of hell, is paired with Surah 101, which gives warning of the Day of Recompense. Surah 103 portrays the people who possess moral excellence and who will therefore be saved from hell. Surah 104 is paired with it and portrays the people who suffer from moral sickness and will consequently be condemned. Surah 105 reminds the Quraysh of God's protection of the Ka'bah from an attack by Abraha, the Abyssinian ruler of the Yemen. Surah 106, which is paired with it, draws from this the conclusion that the Quraysh ought to worship only the Lord of the Ka'bah. Surah 107 and Surah 108, which are probably both early Meccan surahs, are a fitting sequel to this. Surah 107 indicts the Quraysh for being unworthy custodians of the Ka'bah, whereas Surah 108 draws from this the conclusion that they will be dismissed from its custodianship. Both surahs reflect a situation in which Muhammad was worshipping in proximity to the pagan Meccans. There is an implicit contrast between his prayer (108.2) and the [idolatrous] prayer of the rich Meccan merchants who rejected true religion and charity (107.1–6). We may infer from 107.2 that Muhammad had been stigmatized as an orphan (cf. 93.6) and from 108.3 that he was still taunted for being childless. Finally, there is a contrast between the material wealth of the Meccans and Muhammad's spiritual wealth or 'abundance' (108.1). In Surah 109, there is a further development: the Prophet is now instructed to dissociate himself from the false worship and false religion of the 'unbelievers'. Despite the difficulty in dating Surah 110, it seems to reflect the situation at a time when Muhammad was rapidly rising to power and when his victory over the Meccans and their mass-conversion to Islam were foreseeable but were not yet a reality. It thus marks a further stage in the evolution of Muhammad's relationship with the unbelievers. Surah 111 is widely regarded as an early Meccan surah pronouncing a curse on a bitter opponent of the Prophet, nicknamed Abū Lahab – 'Father of Flame' – because of his radiant appearance. It is said that he was the richest of Muhammad's uncles, and that his real name was 'Abd al-'Uzzā – 'Servant of al-'Uzzā', one of the goddesses worshipped along with Allah. Iṣlāḥī accepts the identification of Abū Lahab, but argues that the surah is Madīnan. In his view, v.1 is not a curse but a prophecy which was about

to be fulfilled: 'the power of Abū Lahab will be broken'. It owes its present position to the fact that Abū Lahab was the 'high priest' of Meccan paganism. I am not entirely swayed by Iṣlāḥī's arguments for a Madīnan date, but even if the surah is Meccan, it would have gained added poignancy in the Madīnan period at the time when Abū Lahab's power and influence were about to be eclipsed. Its position immediately after Surah 110 would thus still be highly appropriate. The prospect of the final triumph over Meccan polytheism leads naturally enough to Surah 112 with its uncompromising statement of monotheism. Again, I do not think it matters a great deal whether this surah is Madīnan, as Iṣlāḥī alleges, or Meccan, as is generally held. There is much debate about the meaning of 112.2. One possible translation is 'Allah, the one to whom recourse is made', in which case it is highly appropriate that this surah precedes Surahs 113 and 114, the two surahs of refuge with which the Qur'an ends.

13.6 Conclusion

Although I am impressed by many of Iṣlāḥī's insights, I still have reservations about his overall scheme. In addition to the problems which I highlighted in Section 4, there are two unanswered questions. First, if his explanation of the arrangement of the surahs is correct, why does it seem not to have been known to the Companions of the Prophet? Second, how is Iṣlāḥī's belief that the surahs are arranged in alternating blocks of Meccan and Madīnan material to be reconciled with the traditional view that a number of the Meccan surahs contain one or more Madīnan āyahs? Nevertheless, his scheme does give very plausible explanations for all of the glaring exceptions to the decreasing-length rule which I was unable to explain in the previous chapter.

Postscript

Like Margaret Drabble's fictional character, many English readers of the Qur'an are perturbed to discover that the canonical order of the surahs is not the order in which they were revealed, and like him too, they find the Qur'an's apparent lack of respect for 'sequence' disconcerting. In other words, the Qur'an offends both their historical and their literary sensibility. Taking my cue from his remarks, I therefore embarked on a historical and literary study of the sacred text, although not before I had attempted to explain the part that it plays in the lives of believers.

Despite the dearth of information in the Qur'an itself about its date and provenance, I showed how the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature could be used to construct a plausible chronological framework for the revelations. I argued that Crone and Cook's wholesale rejection of the Islamic tradition was unjustified; that the enigmatic references to Muhammad and his followers, which they culled from putatively early Christian and Jewish sources, would not bear the weight of their interpretation; and that their hypothetical reconstruction of the rise of Islam made less sense of the Qur'anic data than my own more conservative proposal. Nevertheless, my optimism did not extend to the principal Islamic resources for determining the chronological order of the surahs. I argued that it was unlikely that the traditions about the 'occasions of the revelation', the literature concerning āyahs which have been 'abrogated', or the lists of Meccan and Madīnan surahs, enshrined more than a very limited core of information which was preserved and transmitted by the Companions of the Prophet. They seemed, rather, to represent the informed opinion of later exegetes. Because of this, I concluded that neither the resources themselves nor the surah headings of the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur'an which are based on them should be regarded as sacrosanct. I therefore proceeded to examine the attempts of European scholars to date the revelations on the basis of style and content. I demonstrated that, despite the obvious weaknesses of Nöldeke's approach, his reclassification of the surahs supplemented by some of Bell's observations about the way in which the surahs have been revised, furnishes us with a better working hypothesis than the standard Egyptian chronology.

Having dealt as best I could with the problem of chronology, I then turned my attention to the literary issues. As a literary text, the Qur'an is at first reading extremely bewildering. It seems to defy analysis. I therefore concentrated on a limited corpus: the forty-eight relatively brief surahs which Nöldeke ascribed to the first Meccan period. I discovered that forty-three of them comprised one or more sections, each of which dealt with one of six principal subjects: polemic, eschatology, God's personal communication with the Messenger, the signs of God's power and beneficence, lessons from history, and the status and authenticity of the revelation. I analysed each type of section in turn, making an exhaustive inventory of the small units of which it was composed. The next step was to investigate how these six 'registers' were combined in whole surahs. I began with surahs spoken in a single register, and progressed in stages to those in two registers, those in three registers and those in four or more registers. The analysis was then extended to the remaining Meccan surahs, where I found that the same six registers were present, although they were not always concentrated in discrete sections. I further discovered that there were subtle links between the different registers, both within individual surahs and across the whole corpus of Meccan revelations. Next, in order to impress on the reader how much is lost when the Qur'an is translated from Arabic into English, I investigated the interrelationship of sound, meaning and structure in a handful of Meccan surahs. The literary analysis of the Madīnan surahs is much more problematical because of their length. Nevertheless, I discussed the evolution of the six registers in the Madīnan period and demonstrated that Surah 2, the longest surah in the Qur'an, was a coherent whole.

After discussing the structure of the surahs, I tackled the thorny issue of the dynamics of the Qur'anic discourse. I argued that if the Qur'an is treated as a closed corpus, it is perfectly consistent. God is the implied speaker throughout; but He employs the first person plural (We), the first person singular (I) and the third person singular (He) to refer to Himself. With the first person plural He expresses power, majesty or generosity. With the first person singular He safeguards His unity, strikes a note of intimacy, or gives vent to His wrath. With the third person singular He conveys to humankind a universal message in language which they themselves can re-use.

The final two chapters were devoted to investigating the reasons for the present arrangement of the surahs. I showed that there are many exceptions to the decreasing-length rule, some of which could be explained by the concern of the editor (or editors) to group together surahs which

begin with the same detached letters, but others which could not. I also showed that there are at least thirty instances of a word or phrase near the beginning of a surah echoing a word or phrase near the end of the previous surah. It thus seems clear that the editorial process was much more sophisticated than most non-Muslim scholars suppose. Whether, on the other hand, it was as complex as Iṣlāḥī would have us believe is a different matter. Nevertheless, Iṣlāḥī's scheme does furnish plausible explanations of the otherwise inexplicable exceptions to the decreasing-length rule. It is also a very useful mnemonic device for finding one's way round the Qur'an.

My task is almost at an end, but there are others in store.

First, there is a serious historical problem which I have not tackled; the question of how and when the Qur'an was collected and edited. Until comparatively recently, most non-Muslim scholars accepted the tradition that it was collected by Zayd b. Thābit at the instigation of the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, and that the text was standardized by the third Caliph, 'Uthmān. During the past twenty years, however, Wansbrough and others have argued that this tradition is unreliable, and that there was a long period of relatively fluid oral transmission. On the other hand, many Islamic scholars believe that, although the Qur'an was not collected until the caliphate of Abū Bakr, the precise order of the surahs and āyahs was fixed during the Prophet's lifetime. These scholars set great store by the tradition that he used to recite all the Qur'an during Ramaḍān, and that in the year he died Gabriel recited it with him twice.

Second, there is an important theological issue: the question of the status of the Qur'an as the word of God. The case for considering the Qur'an as revelation is a very strong one, but it should by now be clear that it is a highly sophisticated text and not simply a series of propositions which require human assent.

Finally, there is a hermeneutical dilemma: the reader who has discovered the Qur'an naturally wishes to know how to interpret it in today's world. This entails understanding how it has been interpreted by past generations and how its meaning has frequently been distorted for ideological reasons. These tasks, I will undertake on another occasion, *in shā' Allāh.*



Zoomorphic calligraphy

Appendix A

Table for converting āyah numbers

The left-hand column gives the numbers in the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur'an. To find an āyah in the translations by Bell or Arberry (which are based on Flügel's text) add or subtract as shown. In some instances the letters a and b are employed to distinguish the first and second halves of an āyah.

Surah 1	2–7a	−1
Surah 2	2–20	−1
	21–40	−2
	41–64	−3
	65–67	−4
	68–78	−5
	79–143a	−6
	143b–178a	−5
	178b–216a	−4
	216b–219a	−3
	219b–220a	−2
	220b–221	−1
	235–257a	+1
	257b–267a	+2
	267b–270	+3
	271–272	+2
	273–276	+1
Surah 3	2–3	−1
	4a	−2
	4b	−1
	5	−1
	6–20a	−2
	20b–28	−1
	29–31	−2
	32–33	−3
	34–35	−4
	36–38	−5
	39a	−6
	39b–48	−5
	49–50	−6
	51–75a	−7
	75b–97a	−6
	97b–103a	−5
	103b–126	−4
	127–131	−5
	132–147	−6
	148–152a	−7
	152b–179a	−6
	179b–180a	−5
	180b–183a	−4
	183b–193a	−3
	193b–195a	−2
	195b	−1
	197–199a	−1
Surah 4	4–6a	−1
	6c–12a	+1
	12b	+2
	12c	+3
	12d–25a	+4
	25b–27	+5
	28–42	+4
	43–44	+3
	45–46a	+2
	46b–67	+3
	68–98	+2
	99–105	+1
	119–157	−1
	158–172a	−2
	172b–173a	−1
	175–176	−1

Surah 5	2b–3a	+1
	3b	+1
	4–6a	+2
	6b–15	+3
	16–17a	+2
	17b–32a	+3
	32b–48a	+4
	48b–65	+5
	66–78	+4
	79–85	+3
	86–91	+2
	92–98	+1
	102–110a	−1
Surah 6	67–73	−1
	135b–162	+1
Surah 7	2–29	−1
	30–105	−2
	106–135	−3
	136–143a	−4
	143b–146a	−3
	146b–148a	−2
	148b–158a	−1
	167–186a	−1
	192–206	−1
Surah 8	36–42a	+1
	42b–62	+2
	63–75	+1
Surah 9	61b–129	+1
Surah 10	10b–79	+1
Surah 11	5a	+1
	5b–7a	+2
	7b–19a	+3
	20–52a	+2
	52b–74	+3
	75–82	+2
	83–86a	+1
	86b–93a	+2
	93b–96	+3
	97–118	+2
	119–121	+1
Surah 12	96–102	+1
Surah 13	5b–17	+1
	29–31a	−1
Surah 14	9b–10a	+1
	10b–11a	+2
	11b–21a	+3
	21b–22a	+4
	22b–32	+5
	33	+4
	34–38	+3
	39–40	+2
	41–44a	+1
	44c–45	+2
	46–50	+1
Surah 16	21–23a	+1
	23b–108	+2
	109–127	+1
Surah 17	9–25a	+1
	25b–46a	+2
	46b–50	+3
	51–104	+2
	105–107	+1
Surah 18	3–22a	−1
	24–32	−1
	33–57a	−2
	57b–84	−1
	85–86a	−2
	86b–98a	−1
Surah 19	2–4	−1
	7–13	+1
	26–75a	+1
	75b–76a	+2
	76b–88	+3
	89–91	+2
	92–93	+1
Surah 20	2–10	−1
	15–33	+1
	39–40a	+1
	40b–61a	+2
	61b–72	+3
	73–77a	+2
	77b–78	+3
	79–86	+2
Surah 21	28–66	+1
Surah 22	18–20	+1
	25–42	+1

	44–78	–1
Surah 23	28–33a	+1
	33b–115	+2
	116	+1
Surah 24	15–19	–1
	45–60a	–1
	60b	–2
	61	–1
Surah 25	3–19a	+1
	19b–58	+2
	59–65	+1
Surah 26	2–49a	–1
	227b	+1
Surah 27	44–65	+1
	65–93	+2
Surah 28	2–23	–1
Surah 29	2–52	–1
Surah 30	2–55	–1
Surah 31	2–33	–1
Surah 32	2–10	–1
Surah 33	42–50	–1
Surah 34	11–54a	–1
Surah 35	7–19	+1
	21–22	–1
	23–27	–2
	28–37a	–3
	37b–43a	–2
	43b–44a	–1
Surah 36	2–30a	–1
Surah 37	30–48	–1
	49–102a	–2
	102b	–1
	102c	–0
Surah 38	2–44	–1
	75b–84	+1
Surah 39	3b	+1
	3c–7a	+2
	7c–11	+3
	12–17	+2
	18–62	+1
Surah 40	2–3	–1
	18–31a	+1
	31b–37a	+2
	37b–53	+3
	54–71	+2
	72–73	+1
Surah 41	2–27	–1
Surah 42	2	–1
	3–13a	–2
	13b–32	–1
	33–44a	–2
	44b–51	–1
Surah 43	2–52	–1
Surah 44	2–37	–1
Surah 45	2–37	–1
Surah 46	2–35	–1
Surah 47	4b–15a	+1
	15b–38	+2
Surah 50	14–45a	–1
Surah 53	26b–57	+1
Surah 55	2–17a	–1
Surah 56	23–47	–1
	67–92	–1
Surah 57	14–20a	–1
Surah 58	2–20	+1
Surah 71	6–23	–1
	25–28	+1
Surah 72	22–25	+1
Surah 74	31b	+1
	31c	+2
	31d–38	+3
	39–40	+2
	41–50	+1
	55–56	–1
Surah 78	40	+1
Surah 80	16–19	–1
Surah 89	2–15	–1
	16–24	+1
Surah 98	3–8a	–1
Surah 101	2–6	–1
	7–8	–2
	9–11	–3
Surah 106	4a	–1

Appendix B

A note on English translations of the Qur'an

Although there are over forty English-language translations of the Qur'an, none of them is entirely satisfactory and some are extremely unreliable. Those by Yusuf Ali and Marmaduke Pickthall are the most popular with Muslims. They are reasonably accurate but not very consistent. The numbering of the āyahs occasionally differs from that of the standard Egyptian edition which is used in this book.

To find an āyah in Yusuf Ali's translation, add:

5.1b–15a + 1, 5.15b + 2, 5.17–23a + 2, 5.23b–120 + 3. (As far as I can ascertain, the numbering in all surahs other than Surah 5 is identical with that in the standard Egyptian edition.)

To find an āyah in Pickthall's translation, add or subtract:

1.2–6 – 1, 1.7a – 1, 6.73b–165 + 1, 10.1–109 + 1, 18.19–110 + 1, 36.36–83 – 1, 38.1–88 +1

The reader should be warned of the following serious defects in several recent translations:

1. Reading into the text the tenets of the self-styled 'Ahmadiyya Muslims', e.g. references to Jesus being taken down alive from the cross: Zafrulla Khan, Muhammad Ali.

2. Elimination of miracles, and references to the jinn: Zafrulla Khan, Muhammad Ali, Ahmed Ali, Asad (sometimes).

3. Making descriptions of the creation and the created order accord with modern scientific theory: Zidan and Zidan, Ahmed Ali, Asad (sometimes).

4. Making the references to women, prescribed punishments and other ethical issues accord with modern European values: Ahmed Ali, Asad (occasionally).

5. Reading into the text ultra-traditionalist interpretations of references to women and other legal matters: al-Hilāli and Khan, S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali.

6. Inadequate grasp of English: Khatib, S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali.

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Most translations from the Arabic currently in print in the UK or USA are listed, together with a few others of historical importance. Translations of Urdu translations are not included. The date on the left is that of the first edition. For a more complete list (with some inaccuracies) up to 1980, see the bibliography by J. D. Pearson.

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Notes

Introduction

1. Margaret Drabble, *A Natural Curiosity*, 27 (for the date and place of publication of books which are cited in the notes, consult the Bibliography).

1. The Qur'an as Experienced by Muslims

1. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* I,3. There are several variants of this tradition.
2. In assonanced prose, as distinct from rhymed prose, the vowels of the final word in each line are the same although the consonants differ. For instance, most of the āyahs in Surah 4 end in a word which has the vowels *a*, *ī* and *ā*: *raqībā*, *kabīrā*, *sadīdā*, etc. In discussing the Qur'an it is common to extend the use of the term assonance to include rhymes which are due purely to the presence of inflexions. Thus, for example with the words *fāsiqūn* and *khālidūn*, one would speak of assonance rather than rhyme, because *-ūn* is an inflexion indicating the masculine plural.
3. Units of equal duration, the duration of a long vowel being twice that of a short one. The rhythm can also be analysed in terms of metrical feet, long and short syllables, and stress. See the discussion in Arberry, *The Holy Koran: An Introduction With Selections*, 20–5, and the detailed analyses in Crapon de Caprona, *Le Coran: aux sources de la parole oraculaire*, 215–560.
4. It is pronounced 'with the back of the tongue closing the arches of the back of the mouth, which are laterally squeezed nearer together to make the closure easier', Tritton, *Teach Yourself Arabic*, 17. My account of Arabic sounds is drawn largely from this work.
5. Some inflexions are not pronounced 'in pause', i.e. when they occur at the end of an āyah. My transliteration corresponds to the pronounced forms, not the written forms, which in this instance are *khalaqa* and *'alaqin*.
6. A close modern English-language parallel to this is President Eisenhower's campaign slogan 'I Like Ike', in which the desired attitude is evoked by playing on the morphological similarity of his nickname to the verb 'like'.
7. *-ūn* is the nominative masculine plural ending of nouns and participles and the second and third person masculine plural ending of verbs in the imperfect tense; *-īn* is the genitive masculine plural ending.
8. Most Arabic words are derived from verbs which have only three consonants. To determine the form of a word you replace these three consonants with *f*, '

and *l* from the verb *fa'ala* 'to do'. Thus *ḥakīm* has the form *fa'īl*, *ḥikmah* has the form *fi'lah*, and so on.

9. See previous note.
10. The third- and second-person-plural masculine pronominal suffixes 'their' and 'your'. Note that unlike English, which has possessive pronouns that precede the nouns, Arabic has pronominal suffixes. For example, the Arabic for 'deeds' is *a'māl*, but 'their deeds' is *a'mālu-hum* (in the accusative this becomes *a'māla-hum*, as in 47.1).
11. The dual form (in addition to the singular and the plural, Arabic has the dual to indicate two of any thing, or an action performed by two people).
12. The non-typical assonances and rhymes occur in Surahs 67; 69–77; 78.6–81.18; 82.1–8, 84–94; 96–102.2; 103–106 and 108–114. The brief interludes exhibiting the typical pattern are Surahs 68; 78.1–5; 81.19–28; 82.9–18; 83; 95; 102.3–8; 107.
13. I am using the word alliteration in a loose sense to cover instances of multiple occurrences of the same consonant. In the example given, the consonant *m* occurs six times.
14. Here the repetition of *w* and *s* is not simply alliterative, because it imitates the sound of whispering. Note that the dotted *ṣ* in *ṣudūr* is pronounced like the ordinary *s* but with the blade of the tongue against the teeth ridge and its tip behind the lower teeth.
15. According to the Prophet, this night is one of the odd nights among the last ten nights of the month, i.e. the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th (Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* III,60).
16. See Haywood and Nahmad, *A New Arabic Grammar of the Written Language*, 497f. and 511.
17. Tabrīzī, *Mishkat al-Maṣābih*, No. 2199.
18. This is known technically as *qalqalah*.
19. For further details, consult Surty, *A Course in the Science of Reciting the Qur'an*.
20. This and related issues are discussed at length in Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*.
21. See Robinson, *Friday Prayers at the Mosque*.
22. For example, if in one *rakah* you recite 55.7–12, in the next you may recite any part of 55.13–78 or of Surahs 56–114 but not 55.1–6 or any part of Surahs 2–54.
23. According to Goodman, *Avicenna*, 11, he had mastered the Qur'an by the age of ten.
24. Bukharī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* VI, 238.
25. Hussein, *An Egyptian Childhood*, 19 (slightly emended).
26. Ibid., 28.
27. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, vii.
28. Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 142.

29. See Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, Vol. 1, 45, quoting the classical commentator Nīsābūrī.
30. Ibid., 43, quoting a ḥadīth reported by Ubayy.
31. Knud Holmboe, *Desert Encounter*, cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 119, but without full bibliographical details.
32. In my *Friday Prayers at the Mosque* this is shown being performed in a mosque after the Friday prayers.
33. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters I*, 248, quoting a ḥadīth reported by 'Alī.
34. Lane, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 260f.
35. I have anecdotal evidence of this from Bradford Muslims who disapprove of the practice. See, however, Knott and Khokher, 'Religious and ethnic identity among young Muslim women in Bradford'. On p. 603 the authors record an interview with a young woman with personal experience of this practice. (For full details of journal articles and contributions to collective works, consult the Bibliography.)
36. This exaggerated reverence is very common among Muslims from the Indian sub-continent. Some Muslims regard such reverence as superstition and make a point of placing the Qur'an on the floor, albeit in a clean spot. Some young Muslims also carry small zip-up Qur'ans in their hip pockets.
37. In ordinary Arabic books, only the consonants are printed.
38. Hasan Askari, *Alone to Alone*, 113. I had the privilege of hearing this read by a young woman at a *dhikr* session led by Hasan shortly after he had written it.

2. *Anchoring the Revelations in Space and Time*

1. Compare 6.7,35,37,124; 7.203; 40.78.
2. On the question of whether or not these passages refer to the sub-units of the surahs which are now generally known as āyahs, see Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, 121–6.
3. For a brief and informative discussion of the purpose of the Dome of the Rock see Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Vol. 1, 51–6.
4. Unless, of course, one thinks the revelations belong to a time later than the Arab conquests of North Africa and Persia.
5. See Welch, 'Muhammad's Understanding Of Himself: The Koranic Data', and Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca*.
6. See Crone, *Meccan Trade And The Rise Of Islam*, 134f.
7. See Brice, *An Historical Atlas Of Islam*, vi–vii and 14.
8. It must be admitted that although the identification of Mecca with Macoraba seems plausible, it is not absolutely certain. Crone, *Meccan Trade And The Rise of Islam*, 135f., rejects it. She also rejects the South Arabian derivation of the name Macoraba and points out that it is not clear how it could have evolved into *Makkah* (the Arabic form of Mecca).

9. Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, 7.
10. See Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to their Eclipse under Islam*, 41f. On the other hand, this passage may simply be a reference to Daniel 3.
11. See Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 304f. The tradition that puts 'the year of the elephant' c. 570, so that it coincides with the year of Muhammad's birth, cannot be reconciled with the inscriptional evidence for Abraha's reign.
12. This variant reading is not generally accepted by Muslims because it is not well-attested. It does, however, only affect the vocalization, not the consonantal text. Instead of *GHuLiBat* (have been vanquished) and *yagGHLiBūna* (will vanquish), what is read is *GHaLaBat* (has vanquished) and *yuGHLaBūna* (will be vanquished). This reading is mentioned in Tusī, Vol. 8, 228. He attributes it to Ibn 'Amr and Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī.
13. It is translated in Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, xliii-xlvii.
14. See Beeston et al., *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the end of the Umayyad period*, 356f.
15. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 691–798.
16. Guillaume, *New Light On The Life Of Muhammad*.
17. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, assumes that the passages from Ṭabarī are authentic and inserts them at appropriate points in his translation. Each insertion is, however, placed in brackets and prefixed with Ṭ.
18. Did Muhammad intend his men to violate the sacred month, because he regarded its observance as a pagan practice? Or did the caravan arrive earlier than expected, so that the incident occurred at the end of Rajab, rather than at the beginning of the following month as planned? The matter is discussed at length in Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 5–10.
19. Bosworth and Richardson (eds.), *A Commentary on the Qur'ān Prepared by Richard Bell*, 363.
20. See Watt, 'The condemnation of the Jews of Banū Qurayẓah: A study in the sources of the *sirah*', 160–71; Arafat, 'New Light on the Story of Banū Qurayẓa and the Jews of Medina', *JRAS* 1976, 100–67; Kister, 'The Massacre of the Banū Qurayẓa: A re-examination of a tradition', *JSAI* 8, 1986, 61–96.
21. Robinson, 'Reflections on the Rushdie Affair'.

3. An Alternative Account of the Rise of Islam

1. Crone and Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, 3.
2. Ibid.
3. 3–28 and the notes on 152–79.
4. Jesus is called *al-masīḥ*, 'the Messiah', eleven times in the Qur'an; the docetic account of the crucifixion occurs at 4.157; and there are twenty-three references to Jesus as 'the Son of Mary', but none to Mary's husband Joseph, or to the latter's Davidic descent.

5. In the Hebrew Bible, the prophetic canon includes Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings as well as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Book of the Twelve Prophets (known in English as the 'minor' prophets, Amos, Hosea, and so on). All these books were rejected by the Samaritans, who accepted only the Pentateuch. The Qur'an briefly mentions Saul, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha and Jonah, but there is a much greater incidence of 'Pentateuchal' material. Crone and Cook imply that the references to the prophets are late, and post-date the establishing of Muhammad 'in the role of a Mosaic scriptural prophet' (18).
6. Qur'an 15.80–84.
7. Josephus, *Antiquities* XVIII, 116–19.
8. Compare the assertion in his autobiography that at the age of nineteen he began to live in accordance with the rules of the Pharisees, 'a sect having points of resemblance to that which the Greeks call the Stoic school' (*Life* 12).
9. It seems likely that Josephus' originally negative remarks about Jesus, in *Antiquities* XVIII 63f., were altered by Christian scribes. See the discussions in Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, 198f., and Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 45f.
10. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 202.
11. The name Chrestus being a misunderstanding of *Christos*, the Greek word for Messiah.
12. Wansbrough remarks that '... most, if not all, have been or can be challenged on suspicion of inauthenticity', *BSOAS* 41, 1978, 155.
13. The papyrus PERF 558 mentioned in Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 157 n. 39.
14. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, 18. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries English writers more frequently called them 'Mahometans'. There is no evidence, however, of any English person using the correct term 'Moslems' before 1615, and its widespread use is much later.
15. See Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 242.
16. Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 4, cf. 152f. n. 7.
17. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, 36–42. This chronicle is mentioned in *Hagarism*, 157 n. 39, in a different context.
18. Cited in Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*, 138.
19. For an attempt to situate the relevant Qur'anic material in the traditional chronological framework see Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 23–34.
20. *Hagarism*, 169 n. 32. They discount this evidence because the submission is to Christ rather than to God.
21. The view that the Gospels were written in the first century is based on: (*a*) internal evidence; (*b*) the existence of Gospel fragments preserved on papyri, which were *probably* written in the second century; and (*c*) references to, and quotations from, the Gospels in the works of second-century Christian

authors. If we were to discount this evidence and insist on datable inscriptions or references in works written *and* preserved by non-Christians, we would have to assume a fourth-century date.

22. See above, the sixth of the twelve points suggesting alternative interpretations of Crone and Cook's evidence.
23. See n. 19.
24. The punishment with which the Meccan pagans were threatened was meted out to them by Allah at the battle of Badr. In the Madīnan surahs, which are more concerned with building up the Muslim community, the earlier apocalypticism is replaced by refrains concerning the contrasting fates awaiting believers and unbelievers in the hereafter.
25. *Hagarism*, 173 n. 24.
26. Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, Vol. 4, 213.

4. *Traditional Resources for Determining the Chronological Order of the Surahs*

1. For further information on this subject see Rippin, 'The Exegetical Genre *asbāb al-nuzūl*'.
2. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 2, 293.
3. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī an-Nīsabūrī, *Asbāb an-Nuzūl.*
4. Jalāl ad-Dīn 'Abd ar-Raḥman b. a. Bakr aṣ-Ṣuyūṭī, *Asbāb an-Nuzūl* printed along the lower margin of *Tafsīr al-Imāmayn al-Jalālayn.*
5. Ibid., 716.
6. Wāḥidī (n. 3), 12.
7. Ṣuyūṭī (n. 4), 816.
8. von Denffer, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, 99.
9. See Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān*, 22.
10. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *The Qur'an in Islam*, 90f.
11. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān*, 62.
12. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 493ff.
13. Ibn Sa'd and Waqīdī date it in year 5; Ibn Hishām dates it in year 6. See Buhl and Welch, 'Muhammad', *EI*² 7, 371. The latter date is perhaps to be preferred, for it would make more sense for the incident to have occurred after the revelation of 33.53, which imposes the *ḥijāb* on the Prophet's wives.
14. See Rāzī's comments on 2.219, translated in Gätje, *The Qur'ān and its Exegesis*, 200–90.
15. Some of the classical commentators quote Ibn 'Abbās as holding this view. See McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 118f.
16. It was widely held that 9.5, the 'sword verse', abrogated many other passages. Ibn Salāma (d. 1020) listed more than a hundred. See Appendix B of Powers, 'The Exegetical Genre *nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa-mansūkhuhu*'.
17. See ash-Shāfi'ī in Khadduri, *Al-Shāfi'ī's Risāla*, 197–9.

18. Cited in Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation*, 52.
19. One version of this tradition is found in Bukhari. See Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, 79.
20. Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, IV, 364.
21. See Burton, '"Those are the high-flying cranes"'.
22. See Powers, 'Exegetical Genre', 122f.
23. Those who denied the applicability of abrogation in this instance included Tabarī, Tūsī and Ibn Kathīr. See the discussion in McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 118–20.
24. The dual demonstrative pronoun in 4.16 is masculine. It is usually interpreted as denoting the male and female partners to the act, but it could refer to two men. In that case 4.15 may refer to an act committed by two women.
25. See Burton, '"High-flying cranes"'.
26. Cited in Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans*, Part 1, 59f. 'Abd al-Kāfi identified the surahs by their names. Nöldeke replaced the names with the surah numbers, for the convenience of non-Muslim readers. I have adopted the same practice when citing lists from other medieval sources.
27. Ya'qūbi, *Tarīkh*, Vol. 2, 33f, and 43.
28. See Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans*, 1, 60.
29. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, Vol. 1, 49–52.
30. The former is preserved in the *Itqān* of Ṣuyūtī (see *GDO* I, 60) and the latter in the anonymous *Kitāb al-Mabānī* (see Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans*, I, 63).
31. Even this date may be too early, as az-Zuhrī's name was frequently inserted into *isnāds* of traditions which did not exist in his time. See Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 246f.
32. It is also known as the King Fu'ad edition and the Royal Egyptian edition. A Western scholar, Gustav Flügel, had already published an Arabic Qur'an in 1834, but this did not meet with the approval of Muslims.
33. E108.
34. E110.
35. See Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans*, Vol. 1, 62.
36. Abū al-Husayn b. Muslim b. al-Hajjāj, *Al-Jāmi' aṣ-Ṣahīh al-Musammā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Part 8, 243. ET in Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 7174.
37. See the discussion in Burton, '"High-flying Cranes"', 186f.
38. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, Vol. 6, 314.
39. See Chapter 1.

5. Western Attempts at Dating the Revelations

1. There are useful summaries in Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, 112f., and Welch, 'al-Kur'ān', *EI*² VI 416ff.
2. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans* 1, 74–234. The first edition was published in 1860.

3. Nominal Muslims who mocked the Prophet behind his back.
4. The *fatḥ* which is spoken of in 57.10 as in the past is probably also the victory at Badr. See Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans* 1, 195.
5. My summary of Bell's views is based mainly on Bell, *The Qur'an*, and on the detailed notes intended to accompany this translation, which were alas not published until thirty-nine years after his death as Bosworth and Richardson (eds.), *A Commentary on the Qur'ān Prepared by Richard Bell*. I have, however, also drawn on Bell's Gunning Lectures published as *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*; his *Introduction to the Qur'ān*; and on Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*.
6. Bell, *The Qur'an*, Vol. 2, 690.
7. Ibid., 689.
8. Bell refers to *al-qur'an* and *al-kitāb* as 'the Qur'an' and 'the Book', whereas I normally refer to them as the Qur'an and the Scripture. I have retained his terminology when summarizing his work, but I have put the words in inverted commas.
9. Ibid., Vol. 1, vi.
10. Ibid.
11. Bell *The Qur'an*, Vol. 1, 327, and Bosworth and Richardson, *Commentary on the Qur'an*, 1, 578.
12. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans* 1, 104.
13. Bell, *The Qur'an*, Vol. 2, 629ff., and Bosworth and Richardson, *Commentary on the Qur'an*, 2, 479–84.
14. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans* 1, 104.
15. Bell, *The Qur'an*, Vol. 2, 632 and Bosworth and Richardson, *Commentary on the Qur'an*, 2, 485–91.
16. The Arabic word is *kawā'iba* (singular *kā'iba*), which occurs only here in the Qur'an.
17. The Arabic word *ḥūr* 'is properly applied to the blackness of eye seen in a gazelle' (Penrice, *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran*, 39). It could be translated 'black-eyed [damsels]' but since 'wide-eyed black-eyed' sounds rather clumsy, I have opted for the English 'houri', which is of course derived from the Arabic.
18. *innā ansha'nā-hunna inshā'a*. Literally, 'Surely We have made them to grow into a [new] growth'.
19. Or 'loving'.
20. From the same root as the word used to describe them 'restraining' their glances; but 'restrained' would give the wrong impression in this context.
21. 'The surah as a whole seems to be Meccan', Bell, *The Qur'an*, Vol. 2, 548.
22. 1.3; 2.163; 27.30; 41.2; 59.22.
23. I shall deal with the surahs in the Nöldeke-Schwally 'chronological' sequence. The information about Bell's views is drawn from the relevant section of his translation or his comme ntary (see n. 5 above):

(N2) Surah 74 has only two instances; v.31, a Madīnan addition, and v.56, which Bell notes is long for the context and 'corrects' the previous verse.

(N6) Surah 104 has a single occurrence in v.6; Bell regards vv.5–7 as a later explanation.

(N16) Surah 91 has two occurrences in v.13; Bell says that vv. 11–15 are 'later but probably Meccan'.

(N19) Surah 87 has a single occurrence in v.7; Bell says that it is a revision, probably early Madīnan, belonging to the time 'when changes were being made on previous deliverances'.

(N22) Surah 85.1–7, 12–22 has a single occurrence in v.20. Bell regards the whole surah as Madīnan.

(N26) Surah 82 has a single occurrence in the final clause of the last āyah. In Bell's view, vv.17–19 are probably a later explanation (cf. 104.5–7).

(N27) Surah 81 has a single occurrence in the last āyah which Bell describes as 'an afterthought stressing the supremacy of Allah' (cf. 76.30).

(N28) Surah 53.1–22, 24–25, 34–62 has three occurrences: vv. 25, 58 and 62. Bell regards 19–26 as 'fairly late Meccan', and 34–62 as 'late Meccan'.

(N29) Surah 84.1–24 has a single occurrence in v.23. Bell says that vv.20–23 are probably late Meccan.

(N34) Surah 88 has a single occurrence in v.24. Bell regards vv.23–24 as an an addition.

(N40) Surah 52.1–20, 22–28 has a single occurrence in v.27. Bell was inclined to regard vv.25–8 as not contemporary with the original āyahs.

(N44) Surah 112 has two occurrences in vv.1 and 2. Bell suggests that the Surah is Madīnan.

(N48) Surah 1 has two occurrences in vv.1 and 2. Bell says it cannot be earlier than late Meccan.

24. For a much more detailed discussion consult Welch, 'Allah and Other Supernatural Beings: The Emergence of the Qur'anic Doctrine of *Tawhīd*'.
25. See Watt, 'The Qur'ān and Belief in a "High God"'.
26. See Beeston, 'The Religions of Pre-Islamic Yemen'.
27. See Chapter 2.
28. There is a convenient list in Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 339–43.
29. Blachère endorsed Nöldeke's order for the Madīnan surahs, but added Surah 17 to the third Meccan period, and redistributed some of the surahs of the first period. See Blachère, *Le Coran (al-Qor'ān) traduit de l'arabe*, 11–19.
30. Pickthall's dating of the surahs is idiosyncratic. From his prefaces to the surahs, it would seem that he sometimes relied on Nöldeke and sometimes on Islamic tradition.
31. Iṣlāḥī himself does not read German, or any European language.
32. See the discussions in Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 135–44, and Nagel, 'Vom "Qur'ān" zur "Schrift" – Bells Hypothese aus religionsgeschichtlicher Sicht'.

33. Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, 127–35.
34. See the lucid discussion by Rubin, 'Exegesis and *Ḥadīth*: the case of the seven *Mathānī*'.
35. This is the only other passage which contains the word *mathānī*.
36. Blachère, *Introduction au Coran*, 260 – my translation.
37. Welch, 'Allah and Other Supernatural Beings', 745ff.

6. The Formal Elements in the 'Early Meccan' Surahs

1. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus and On Heroes and Hero Worship*, 299.
2. Neuwirth, *Studien Zur Komposition Der Mekkanischen Suren*, 179–203. Whereas Neuwirth gave examples of the various types of section and smaller unit, I have attempted to account for all the material in all forty-eight surahs. This has led me to see the need for refining her classification at certain points, particularly in dealing with the polemical material.
3. See Neuwirth, 'Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Makkan *sūras*'.
4. See Chapter 1, n. 8.
5. 69.13–18 is difficult to analyse. If one simply took into account its formal characteristics, vv.13–14 would be the prelude (because of the *fa-idhā*) and vv.15–18 would be proceedings (because of the recurrence of *yawma'idhin*, see 6.4.2). However, on the basis of content it seems more appropriate to treat vv.13–17 as the prelude and v.18 as the proceedings.
6. It resembles the first of the young child's four questions in the Passover Haggadah: *mā nishtannā hal-laylā haz-zeh mik-kol hal-laylōth* ('Why is this night different from all nights?'), Birnbaum, *The Birnbaum Haggadah*, 61.

7. The Structure of the Meccan Surahs

1. The five surahs are: 1, 109, 112, 113 and 114. Their structure is relatively simple and has been discussed in Chapter 6. 11.1.
2. Hawthorn, *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, 173.
3. See Neuwirth, 'Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Makkan *sūras*', especially 5–6.
4. Bell, *The Qur'an*, Vol. 2, 652.
5. Tritton, *Teach Yourself Arabic*, 17.
6. I have discussed this surah at length in the course of my essay 'The Qur'ān as the Word of God'.
7. Nöldeke was probably correct in regarding this as a later addition.
8. One of these āyahs, v. 32, is very long and is traditionally held to be Madīnan. Nöldeke was probably correct in thinking that the whole of vv. 26–32 were originally absent from the surah.
9. The word *najm* is grammatically singular and could therefore be translated

'star', but it is often used to indicate the plural. The verb *hawā* can mean 'rise' or 'set'.

10. In the Qur'anic cosmology, the heavenly regions are impenetrable to humankind and jinn, because they are protected by shooting stars. See 55.33 and 72.8–11.
11. I tentatively suggest the following twenty-two-part chiasmus in which the divisions are slightly different from those suggested when the surah is analysed into its formal components:

A1 v. 1	'By the heavens with its towers'
A2 v. 2	'By the Promised Day'
A3 v. 3	'By the Witness and that which is witnessed'
B1 v. 4	Curse on the people of the trench
B2 vv. 5f.	Evocation of their deeds
B3 v. 7	What they did (*yaf'alūn*) to the believers.
C1 v. 8a	They blamed them for believing in Allah
C2 v. 8b	The All-mighty the All-praised
C3 v. 9a	His is the sovereignty of heavens and earth
C4 v. 9b	Allah is witness over all things
D v. 10	The punishment of unrepentant persecutors
D' v. 11	The reward of righteous believers
C4' v. 12	The onslaught of thy Lord is terrible
C3' v. 13	He originates and brings back to life
C2' v. 14	The All-forgiving, the All-loving
C1' v. 15	Possessor of the glorious throne
B3' v. 16	'Doer (*fa''āl*) of what He wills'
B2' vv. 17f.	Evocation of the hosts of Pharaoh and Thamūd
B1' v. 19	Persistent denial of the unbelievers
A3' v. 20	'Allah is behind them, All-encompassing'
A2' v. 21	'This surely is a glorious Qur'an'
A1' v. 22	'In a well-guarded tablet'.

12. In Section 4 of Chapter 5.
13. Consult the Bibliography for the articles and monographs by Angelika Neuwirth 1980; A.H. Johns 1981; Odette Petit 1982; Marilyn Robinson Waldman 1985; M.S. Stern 1985; Jacques Berque 1985; Gary A. Rendsburg 1988; Mustansir Mir 1986; Laroussi Gasmi 1986; 1–48. On the question of the extra-biblical parallels to some of the non-biblical features of the Qur'anic story see Speyer 1931, 187–224; Macdonald 1956.
14. I owe the distinction between these two types of tripartite surah to Neuwirth.
15. *Pace* Neuwirth, who regards them all as tripartite. See *Studien Zur Komposition Der Mekkanischen Suren*, 319.

16. Ibid, 320f.
17. This is the interpretation preferred by Muslim commentators, who assume that those who crowded round the Messenger when he stood to pray (v. 19) were the jinn who listened to his recitation of the Qur'an (v. 1). Western scholars frequently suggest that v 19 refers, on the contrary, to the mobbing of Muhammad by the people of Ta'if, when he went there on an unsuccessful mission.
18. By 'Meccan' I mean those which Nöldeke classified as Meccan. We shall see that some of the narrative sections in these surahs seem to presuppose the migration to Yathrib, or at the very least to foreshadow it.
19. I have discussed the Qur'anic narratives about Jesus and Mary in 'Jesus and Mary in the Qur'ān: Some Neglected Affinities', and in *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. For the Abraham narratives see my article, 'Massignon, Vatican II and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion'.
20. The longest versions are 71.1–28; 11.25–49; 26.105–122. The story is told more briefly in 29.14–15; 10.71–73; 7.59–64; 54.9–15; 37.75–82; 21.76–77; 23.23–30, and there are several other allusions to it.
21. The word *dusūr* probably refers to palm-tree fibres used for caulking, although it may simply mean 'nails'.
22. See 7.73–79; 11.61–68, 89; 15.80–84; 26.141–159; 51.43–45; 54.23–31; 69.4–5; 85.17–18; 91.11–15. The story is alluded to in a further nine surahs. The version in 27.45–53 is rather different, as we shall see.
23. See Qur'an 8.30 and Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 222–4.
24. Joseph's story is narrated at length in 12.4–101. In addition, he is mentioned in 6.84; 20.34 and 40.34.
25. See Beeston, 'Items of Arabic Lexicography'.
26. This is the implication of Qur'an 12.5–6. Note that the Qur'an nowhere explicitly identifies Joseph's father with Jacob; indeed 12.6 and 12.38 seem rather to imply that Jacob was one of Joseph's ancestors.
27. The punishment stories are found principally in 79.15–25; 23.45–49 and 43.46–56 (but there are also briefer versions in which Moses is not named: 54.41–42; 69.9; 75.15–16; 85.17–18; 89.10–12). The more developed narratives are found in 7.103–154; 10.75–92; 20.9–98; 26.10–67; 28.3–43 and 40.23–53. Finally there is the story of Moses and his page, in 18.60–82, which is quite distinct from the other Qur'anic material featuring Moses.
28. The English word 'vizier' is derived from the Arabic word *wazīr*. When used in this technical sense, a *wazīr* is a person who is appointed to bear the burden of state.
29. According to Sunni and Shi'ite traditionists, Muhammad said this to 'Alī at the time of the expedition to Tabūk. For this to be alluded to the 94.2, the surah would have to be Madīnan. Note, however, that in a sense 'Alī shared Muhammad's burden at the very beginning of the public ministry, when he alone responded to a request to forty members of his clan for someone to be

his 'brother, trustee and successor'. See Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 12.

30. The evidence for this may be found in pre-Islamic poetry. See Arazi, *La réalité et la fiction dans la poésie arabe ancienne*, 49–103.
31. Cf. 81.15–18; 84.16–18; 89.1–4; 103.1.

8. The Interrelation of Structure, Sound and Meaning in Three Meccan Surahs

1. Comparatively little research has been carried out in this field. A.J. Arberry and Pierre Crapon de Caprona have attempted rhythmic analyses of some surahs – see Chapter 1 no. 3. More recently, Michael Sells has explored the relationship of sound and meaning in Surahs 97 and 101 in two journal articles: 'Sound, Spirit and Gender in *sūrat al-qadr*', and 'Sound and Meaning in *sūrat al-qāri'a*'. There are also some very interesting observations in Nahlah, *Dirāsāt Qur'āniyāt fī Juz' 'amma*.
2. Its structure was summarized in Chapter 7, Section 2.
3. See Chapter 7, Section 2.
4. Bell, *The Qur'an*, Vol. 2, 677.
5. The word is *yunbadhanna*, but the first *n* is pronounced *m* because it precedes a *b*.
6. The word is *'amadin*, but it is pronounced *'amadim* because the next word begins with a *b*.
7. The word is actually *mumaddadatin*, but when it is followed by a pause the case ending *-in* is dropped and the final *t* is pronounced *h*. Hence my transliteration *mummaddadah*. When Surah 105 is recited immediately after Surah 104, however, it is customary not to pause. The word *mumaddadatin* is thus recited in full, but the final *n* is pronounced *m* because of the *b* at the beginning of the next surah. In Qur'anic recitation, whenever an *n* precedes a *b* it is pronounced *m* and nasalized for the sake of euphony. See the examples in the previous two notes. This refinement is known technically as *iqlāb* ('alteration').
8. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2901.
9. Ibid., 2672.
10. Ibid., 3026.
11. The word is related to *taFa''uD*, meaning 'ardour'. See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2323.
12. For the structure see Chapter 7, Section 4.
13. See my detailed summary of Bell's position in Chapter 5, Section 4.
14. In vv. 1, 3, 4 and 5 the last word actually ends *-ūna*. In recitation, however, it is pronounced *-ūn* because it precedes a pause.
15. Actually *'aẓīmi*, but pronounced *'aẓīm* in pause.
16. In vv. 6–40 the last word invariably has the accusative case ending *-an*, but

because it is followed by a pause in recitation the *n* is dropped and the final vowel is lengthened to *-ā*.

17. *jazā'an* with the final *n* pronounced *m* to elide with the next word.
18. *saffan* with the final *n* pronounced *l* to elide with the next word.
19. *qarīban* with the final *n* pronounced *y* to elide with the next word.
20. In Arabic words the long vowel *ā* is usually indicated by the presence of the consonant *alif*. However, in the oldest written Korans this '*alif* of elongation' was frequently omitted. In such instances the practice of later scribes was to indicate its omission by a small vertical stroke. For some reason this was not done in the present instance; hence the practice of pronouncing it *'amma*, despite general agreement that the word means the same as *'ammā*.
21. Remember that a short vowel counts as one isochronic unit (1 s. = 1 i.u.) whereas a long vowel counts as two (1 l. = 2 i.u.).
22. The early commentators disagreed about whether this was the Qur'an, or more specifically the announcement that the dead would be raised. Ibn Kathir attributes the former view to Mujāhid and the latter – the interpretation which he favoured – to Qatādah and Ibn Zayd, *Tafsīr* VII, 195.
23. See also the analysis of Surah 104, earlier in this chapter.
24. See n. 16. It is uncertain when the present conventions of recitation were adopted. Originally this may have been pronounced *-CāCa*, or even *-CaCan*.
25. For my reason for not including *-jā* see the previous note.
26. The hearer/reader is not usually aware of this. In the jargon of modern advertising, the message is conveyed subliminally.
27. *mihād*, 'a place of wide extent', from the verb *mahada*, to spread. Arberry's translation 'as a cradle' misses the point.
28. On the structure of so-called pre-Islamic odes see Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, 77f. This structure represents the views of literary theorists several centuries after the rise of Islam. We have no means of ascertaining whether odes conformed to this structure in pre-Islamic times.
29. Compare Qur'an 2.187.
30. The word *mu'ṣirāt*, a feminine plural, occurs only here in the Qur'an. It is apparently derived from the verb *'aṣara*, 'to press', mentioned earlier in my analysis of Surah 103. The classical commentators state that the *mu'ṣirāt* 'press out' the rain, but they disagree as to whether they are rain-clouds or winds. According to the classical lexicographers, the word was also used of adolescent girls because of the onset of their periods when their bodies began to press out the menstrual blood. See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2061.
31. Hence from either Jews or Christians. See Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, 105, who favours the latter.
32. Although some of the classical commentators and lexicographers suspected that it was originally a foreign word (see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*) they were ignorant of its original meaning. It was probably its metaphorical use in post-Qur'anic Arabic to describe any perilously deep well (Lane, *Arabic-*

English Lexicon, 478) that led purists to argue that it was a native Arabic word referring to the depth of hellfire.

33. For the belief that the deeds of the righteous were a treasure in store for them in the afterlife see II Baruch 24.1 (which also speaks of books recording the sins of the wicked) and Matthew 6.19. Compare Romans 2.5, where Paul speaks of treasures of wrath.
34. The commentators are divided about the meaning of the word in the present context. Some think that the singular noun stands for the plural and denotes the spirits of human beings or the jinn.

9. The Integrative Role of Sound and Intertextuality

1. Its structure was summarized in Chapter 7, Section 6.
2. For a detailed summary of Bell's analysis see Chapter 5, Section 4.
3. Crapon de Caprona, *Le Coran*, 407–20. He suggested that the surah arose from the combination of three oracles – A, B and C – which were originally distinct. The first two both consisted of a pair of long strophes separated by a shorter central strophe which highlighted their principal theme, namely the coming catastrophe. Oracle C was structured differently. It had four strophes of seven lines each: two dealing with the story of Moses, the third with the creation, and the fourth with the hour of judgment:

   (A) vv.1–4 + v.5 + vv.6–9.
   (B) vv.10–14 + vv.34–36 + vv.37–41.
   (C)vv.15–20 + vv.21–26 + vv.27–32 + vv.42–46.

   According to him, the Prophet combined these oracles to form a symmetrical five-part surah:

   I The *bismillah* and vv.1–14 = 16 lines, 14 rhymes
   II vv.15–20 = 7 lines, 6 rhymes
   III vv.21–26 = 7 lines, 6 rhymes
   IV vv.27–32 = 7 lines, 6 rhymes
   V vv.34–46 = 16 lines, 14 rhymes.

   The middle section dealt with the revolt and punishment of Pharaoh. Its central hinge – and also according to Caprona the middle line of the whole surah – was v.24, which reports Pharaoh's crime of lèse-divinité: 'He said: "I am your Lord, the Most High."' In its present form, the surah lacks this perfect symmetry. Caprona 'restored' it by deleting v.33 as a later accretion, and splitting vv.12, 16, 25, 27, 40, 42 and 46 so as to produce two lines in each instance. He also had to make several conjectural emendations which included replacing *'ashīyyatan aw ḍuḥā-hā* ('a single evening or its [i.e. and the following?] morning bright') at the end of v.46 with *ghashyata-hā* ('[the time of] its seizing'). Apart from his recognition of the central importance of v.24, Caprona's analysis has little to commend it.

4. In each of āyahs 1–5 the last syllable is *-an*, but it is conventionally pronounced *-ā* in recitation because it precedes a pause.
5. Āyahs 6–14 all end with feminine nouns. In recitation rhyme is produced by pronouncing the *t* as *h* and ignoring the case endings. The words actually end: *-tu*, v.7; *-tun*, vv.8, 9, 12, 13; *-ti*, vv.10, 14; and *-tan*, v.11.
6. In āyahs 15 and 17–26 there is no difference between how the final word is written and how it it is pronounced in pause. Thus although these āyahs rhyme with vv.1–5, the rhyme has been achieved in a different way.
7. Written *ṭuwan* but pronounced *ṭuwā* in pause; see n. 40.
8. *'ibratan* with the *n* pronounced *l* to elide with the next word.
9. In āyahs 27–33 there is no difference between how the final word is written and how it it is pronounced in pause.
10. *matā'an* with the *n* pronounced *l* to elide with the next word.
11. In āyahs 34–41 there is no difference between how the final word is written and how it it is pronounced in pause.
12. Āyah 40 has been divided to indicate the internal rhyme. The sign / has been used to indicate in the translation the point at which this rhyme occurs.
13. In āyahs 42–46 there is no difference between how the final word is written and how it it is pronounced in pause.
14. No significance is to be attached to the way this āyah has been divided.
15. On this basic point, I am in agreement with Neuwirth, *Studien Zur Komposition Der Mekkanischen Suren*, 218, although in other respects my analysis differs from hers. Her 'restoration' of the surah is less radical than Caprona's but she makes three quite unneccessary emendations: 1. deletion of v.33; 2. deletion of *maqāma rabbi-hi* ('standing before his Lord') from v.40; 3. splitting of what is left of v.40 into two short āyahs to counterbalance vv.37–38:

    wa-ammā man khāfa
    wa-nahā n-nafsa 'ani 'l-hawā
    And as for him who feared
    and restrained the soul from desire.

    This improves the symmetry of the eschatological diptych and also furnishes the concluding section of the surah with an extra āyah, so that it has fourteen like the opening section. Unfortunately, however, this is achieved at the cost of introducing an imperfect rhyme. She argues somewhat lamely that in recitation the rhyme was probably preserved by pronouncing *khāfa* as *khafā*.
16. As, for instance, of a bow-string before an arrow is fired. See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2251.
17. Compare the use of *iGHtaRaQa* of a horse mixing amongst other horses and then outstripping them, ibid.
18. This use of the verb was known to the classical lexicographers. See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1289.

19. Note that in Qur'an 8.59f. unbelievers are said wrongly to suppose that they can 'forge ahead' and the Prophet is instructed to muster cavalry against them. Compare 28.4 and 29.39.
20. Note too that in 9 instances out of 26, the verb *sabaqa* – 'to forge ahead', 'to outstrip', or 'to precede' – has as its subject a divine commandment, decree or sentence. See 8.68; 10.19; 11.40; 11.110; 20.129; 23.27; 37.171; 41.45; 42.14.
21. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1067.
22. Ibid., 601.
23. I have tried to capture something of this in translation by a combination of alliteration and assonance: '... Lord called ... hall ... valley ...'.
24. The Arabic *b* and *d*. Their forms are not, however, mirror images of each other as in the Roman script.
25. Because it involves splitting the āyah. See n. 3.
26. Mentioned in 10.89. In the biblical version of the story, the Hebrew verb *rādafa*, 'to pursue', is used (Exodus 14.8f.; 14.23; 15.9, cf. the cognate Arabic word *rādifah* in Qur'an 79.7).
27. See 10.89. In the biblical version, horses are explicitly mentioned (Exodus 15.21, etc.).
28. Nine of the twenty-two references to drowning in the Qur'an refer to the punishment of Pharaoh's people: 2.50; 8.54; 26.66; 29.40; 17.103; 7.136; 43.55 (cf. 79.1).
29. See Qur'an 20.77; 35.18; 80.3, 7; 87.14; 92.18. For a discussion of the meaning of *tazakkā* ('purify oneself') see Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 165–9.
30. See Chapter 6.8.6. The closest parallel is to 96.9–18, which has the same rhyme and similar rhythm and vocabulary. See also 74.21–25, especially the occurrence of the word *aDBaRa* in v. 24.
31. Note that with the exception of the fixing of the mountains, all the signs referred to in these āyahs are also mentioned in the first chapter of Genesis.
32. Moreover the feminine form of the elative is relatively uncommon.
33. See above, n. 3.
34. See above, n. 2.
35. The verb occurs only in 79.32 but there are nine instances of the plural noun *RawāSiy* (e.g. 13.3) denoting 'mountains' or 'headlands'. The noun *muRSā* – literally 'place or time of anchoring' – occurs three times: in 79.42 and 7.187 in connection with 'the Hour' and in 11.41 in connection with Noah's ark. The only other word from this root is the feminine plural adjective *RāSiyāt*, 'standing firm', used in 34.13 of the pots made for Solomon.
36. Qur'an 7.98; 20.59; 91.1; 93.1.
37. See Qur'an 3.41; 6.52; 18.28; 19.11; 30.18; 38.18; 38.31; 40.55. The two exceptions are 19.62 and 40.46, which both refer to the hereafter.
38. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1703.
39. Where possible I have identified formal elements discussed in Chapter 6, but often I have resorted to summarizing the content.

40. Not much weight should be given to the division into nine parts. We shall see when we come to examine the rhyme that the surah is a seamless whole. It does, however, seem to me that it reaches a series of eschatological crescendos.
41. Bell, *The Qur'an*, 262.
42. The verb *istafazza*, which occurs in both these *āyahs*, is not found elsewhere in the Qur'an. Note how the biblical story of the exodus has been modified so that it corresponds more closely to Muhammad's situation at the *hijrah*.

10. The Madīnan Surahs

1. God is traditionally said to have ninety-nine names, but they are not all found in the Qur'an. The most comprehensive treatment of the subject is Gimaret, *les noms divins en Islam*, which is based on the majority of the extant classical Islamic treatises. Two of these are available in translation: Burrell and Daher, *Al-Ghazālī: The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names Of God*, and Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, *Traité sur les noms divins*.
2. I have not included the very important characteristic of Lordship in this list, because although the name *rabb*, 'Lord', occurs over 950 times, it is rarely found in the rhyme clauses. Another important characteristic of God is that He is the Creator. This is occasionally indicated by a divine name, but it is more often implied by specific reference to the creation. Other characteristics besides these nine are Existence, Eternity, Justice and Generosity, but none of them features to any great extent in the rhyme clauses.
3. It occurs thirty-four times in the Qur'an, if we count two instances where the name is in the accusative.
4. The story is similar to that of the heifer in Numbers 19 and that of the calf in Deuteronomy 21.1–9. See further Katsh, *Judaism and the Koran*, 71–3.
5. These are the only occurrences of the singular form, *baqarah*. The plural form, *baqarāt*, is found in 12.43, 46, and the collective noun *baqar* occurs in 2.70; 6.144, 146.
6. I owe this observation to Berque, *Le Coran: essai de traduction de l'arabe annoté et suivi d'une étude exégétique*, 45.
7. For instance, it is traditionally held that vv. 275–81, which forbid usury, were revealed towards the end of the Prophet's life. I shall also argue that some of the instructions concerning the pilgrimage may have been revealed after the Treaty of al-Hudaybiyah.
8. I have followed the divisions proposed by Iṣlāḥī (see below), except that whereas he locates the beginning of the fourth section at v. 163, I locate it at v. 153.
9. More will be said about the work of this distinguished Qur'anic commentator in Chapter 14. For a summary of his analysis of *Surat al-Baqarah*, see Mir, 'The *sūra* as a unity', esp. 215–17.

10. The classical commentators mention that early interpreters suggested that the letters were names of the surahs, or names of God, or abbreviations of His names – in this instance *Allāh Laṭīf Majīd*, 'God Gentle Glorious' – or that they were oaths by which God swore, or that they had a numerical value, or that they were simply a way of attracting attention. More recently, Western scholars have proposed that they are abbreviations of the names of the Companions who preserved the surahs in writing before the Qur'an was collected into a single volume; that they are mystical symbols used as battle cries; or that they are mnemonic devices which summarize the contents of the surahs. None of these suggestions is entirely convincing.
11. The *alif* is not normally transliterated when it occurs at the beginning of a word; but I have made an exception in the present instance for obvious didactic reasons.
12. In v.22 what is sent down is water, whereas in v.23 it is the Qur'anic revelations. Both are signs of God's benevolence.
13. In v.17 a fire kindled by a human being is used as a figure of speech for the Islamic movement kindled by Muhammad which brought light to those around him. In v.24 the fire referred to is hellfire.
14. According to the classical commentators, the reference is to the situation in Yathrib shortly before the *hijrah*. Although the Torah forbade the Jews to shed one another's blood and instructed them to ransom their captives, the Jews of the Banū Qurayẓah and Naḍīr fought against their fellow Jews of the Qaynuqā' because they were allied to opposing non-Jewish tribes.
15. The pronominal suffix could also be translated 'him', in which case the reference would be to Muhammad. Tabātabā'ī favours this interpretation on the grounds that 'the simile "as they recognize their sons", fits recognition of a man not of a book', *al-Mīzān: An Exegesis of the Qur'ān*, Vol. 2, 164. The argument is unconvincing. Compare, for instance, the wide range of contexts in which the English expression 'to know someone/something like the back of one's hand' is used.
16. This phrase occurs earlier in v.104, where it introduces a warning to the believers not to be duped by the Children of Israel. It occurs subsequently in vv.172, 178, 183, 208, 254, 264, 267, 278 and 282.
17. See n. 14.

11. The Dynamics of the Qur'anic Discourse

1. There are no capital letters in Arabic, but most English translators employ them to indicate that God is the speaker.
2. Arabic distinguishes between the second person singular 'thou' and the second person plural 'you'.
3. Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, 66.
4. Ibid.

5. Jakobson, *Essai de linguistique générale*, 214f.
6. This usage, although unusual, is not without parallels. For instance, a king sending his men into battle might say, 'We solemnly charge you to fight valiantly for your King and country'.
7. As the first person singular is frequently indicated by the inflexion of the verb or by a pronominal suffix attached to a noun or preposition, this ruled out reliance on a concordance. The list was therefore compiled by reading through the Qur'an. Hence, a few passages may inadvertently have been overlooked.
8. The speaker here may in fact be Muhammad. See below.
9. Ditto.
10. There are no speech marks in Qur'anic Arabic, although I have provided them here and in the next six āyahs which are quoted, as this is in accordance with English usage.
11. Some translators put this and the following eight passages in speech marks. This is legitimate, but it does obscure the fact that in Arabic there is a slightly greater risk of the words of the embedded speaker being confused with those of the implied speaker.
12. 'I am not a keeper over you' (6.104) is said by Shu'ayb in 11.86. Compare God's words:

    We have not sent thee as a keeper over them (4.80; 42.48).
    They were not sent as keepers over them (83.33).
    Allah is a keeper over them ... (42.6).

    11.2f. resembles the words attributed to Noah in 11.25f. and to 'Ād's brother in 46.21. And 27.91f. resembles 13.36, which is introduced by the command 'Say'.
13. This point will be discussed at length under the rubric of sudden changes in pronoun.
14. Others include Genesis 1.26; 11.7; Exodus 23.20–22; 24.1; and Judges 6.11–18.
15. von Rad, *Genesis*, 206.
16. Qur'an 11.69–77; 15.51–61; 29.31–35 and 51.24–37.
17. Qur'an 11.69–77 and 29.31–35.
18. See Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Part 16, 77–9.
19. For further remarks on the structure of Surah 19, see Chapter 7.7.
20. The didactic questions occur in 77.14; 97.1; 101.3,10; 104.5.
21. The didactic questions occur in 69.3; 74.27; 83.8, 19; 86.2; 90.12. In addition the addressee is singular in 69.7, 52; 74.2–7; 83.24; 86.17; 90.2, where he seems to be Muhammad.
22. Like 105.1; 85.17 introduces a narrative, but note the singular addressee in v.12 and the reference to the heavenly archetype in v.22. As with 107.1, the context of 96.4,11 and 13 is polemical, but note the singular addressee in vv.1, 3, 8 and 19 and the We-discourse in vv.10, 15 and 18. Nevertheless, 85.12

could be addressed to humankind; Mahallī and Ṣuyūṭī assume that 96.8 is addressed to humankind; and Abdul Majid Daryabadī indicates that 96.9 and 11 are addressed to the reader!

23. See Robinson, 'The Qur'ān as the Word of God'.
24. See Chapter 10.2.
25. In addition to passages mentioned in Chapter 2, see for example 33.37; 58.1; and 63.1.
26. See Chapter 4.3.
27. See Chapter 6.7.
28. When paired, these two adjectives – *ra'ūfun raḥīm* – are elsewhere used exclusively of Allah: 2.143; 9.117; 16.7, 47; 22.65; 24.20; 57.9; 59.10.
29. See Abdel Haleem, 'Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes: *Iltifāt* and Related Features in the Qur'ān', especially, 407f. The one notable exception – whose work probably appeared too late for Haleem to take it into account – is Berque, *Le Coran: essai de traduction de l'arabe annoté et suivi d'une étude exégétique*, 740–2.
30. Az-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, III.314., cited in Haleem, 'Grammatical Shift', 410.
31. Abdel Haleem, 'Grammatical Shift'. Whereas he takes a broad definition of *iltifāt* to includes changes in the tense of the verb and changes in case marker, I shall limit my discussion to changes in pronoun.
32. Compare 6.99; 7.57; 13.4; 20.53; 25.48; 27.61; 41.39.
33. Compare 90.1; 69.38; 70.40a.

12. The Order of the Surahs: The Decreasing-Length Rule

1. The following remarks are based on ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, *az-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. 1, 221, and Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, Vol. 3, 2147. See too Arnaldez, *Le Coran: guide de lecture*, 35f. Non-Muslim scholars have proposed different etymologies on the basis of comparative philology. These include the Hebrew *shūrah*, 'a row' of bricks or vines, and Syriac *Sūrta*, 'writing'. See Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 57f.
2. Cited in Rahbar, 'Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Principles of Exegesis Translated from his *Tahrīr fī 'Usū-l al-Tafsīr'*, 324.
3. Think, for example, of the way in which Paul uses the Abraham story in both Galatians 3 and Romans 4, but with changed emphasis. Or consider the similarities and differences in his eschatological teaching in I Thessalonians, I Corinthians and Philippians. Another reason why the comparison is instructive is that as in the epistles, so too in the surahs, one often encounters sudden – and at first sight inexplicable – changes in mood and subject matter. This led earlier generations of scholars to conclude, for instance, that Philippians and II Corinthians must both have been pieced together by an editor who used epistles or fragments of epistles originating in different circumstances. Yet more recently, with an increased awareness of the

rhetorical conventions of Paul's day and age, which were very different from those of our own, several scholars have been able to defend the integrity of these epistles and to give a plausible account of Paul's train of thought (see for example Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 338–49). Likewise, we have seen that a number of surahs which have often been treated as a patchwork of revelations from different times in fact have a perfectly coherent structure.

4. The principal names are given in Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, 539–42. For an exhaustive treatment of the subject see Kandil, 'Die Surennamen in der offiziellen Kairiner Koranausgabe und ihre Varianten', *Der Islam* 69, 1992, 44–60.
5. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans, Teil 2: Die Sammlung des Qorans*, 64.
6. See Danby, *The Mishnah*, xxiv.
7. Noja, *L'Islam e il suo Corano*, 179.
8. Qur'an 36.69; 69.40–42; cf. 21.5; 26.221–6; 37.36; 52.30.
9. See Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*; 153.
10. Noja, *L'Islam e il suo Corano*, 180.
11. Here and throughout this chapter the figures for the number of lines in the various surahs are taken from the table in Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, 206–12, which is based on Redslob's edition of Flügel's text.
12. In view of the ḥadīth referred to in Chapter 1 (n. 32), which counts only 50 words in 2,255, I have have excluded from my reckoning the definite article, pronominal suffixes, inseparable prepositions and conjunctions, on the grounds that they should be considered part of the word to which they are a attached.
13. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans* 2, 68.
14. In answer to this, it might be argued that since Surah 8 and Surah 9 are the only consecutive surahs not separated by the *bismillah*, they should be considered a unity. But in that case, with an aggregate of 450 lines, they ought to come second! So we would still be left with a problem.
15. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans* 2, 67.
16. Based on Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, vol. 1, 53–7.
17. Based on ibid., 58–61.
18. Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans* 2, 67.
19. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 58.
20. The classical commentators furnish evidence of variant readings attributed to Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy, but do not state the order in which they arranged the surahs. Apart from the *Fihrist*, the only evidence is that of the *Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qurān*, compiled in the fifteenth century by the Egyptian polymath Jalal ad-Dīn as-Ṣuyūṭī. The order of the surahs which he attributes to the two Companions is slightly different. See Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans* 2, 40, 32, and Bauer, 'Über die Anordnung der Suren und über die

geheimnisvollen Buchstaben im Qoran'.

21. Supposing, that is, that the surahs in these two manuscripts began and ended as they do in the canonical version.

13. The Order of the Surahs: Iṣlāḥī's Explanation

1. His arguments are set out in detail in an eight-volume Urdu commentary on the Qur'an, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*. I have not had the opportunity of studying this work in depth and have relied heavily on Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān*, and on conversations which I was privileged to have with Mawlana Iṣlāḥī and members of his school. Since January 1991, a series of brief extracts from the *Tadabbur* have appeared in translation in *Renaissance*. All those which had been published by March 1994 are listed in the Bibliography.
2. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān*, 89.
3. For a detailed explanation of the various types of complementarity see ibid., 77f.
4. Most of the relevant data are presented and analysed by Mir, ibid., 90–3.
5. I currently have a research student who has just begun work on G. 3.
6. See the detailed discussion in Mir, ibid., 76, 80–84, to which I have nothing to add.
7. Ibid., 83
8. See Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue et théologie en Islam*, 110–33.
9. Iṣlāḥī is of course correct in noting that *mathānī* is the plural of *mathnā*, which occurs in 4.3; 34.46; 35.1, where it means 'pairs'.
10. Interview with the author, Lahore, 21 March 1994.

Indexes

1. *Index of References to the Bible and Pseudepigrapha*

2. *Index of Qur'anic Passages*

3. *Index of Persons*

The Arabic definite article is ignored. Thus aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk is found under D, al-Faḍl under F, and so on.

4. *Subject Index*

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